



A
MODERN
LOVE
STORY

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A MODERN LOVE STORY

WHICH DOES NOT END AT THE ALTAR

BY

HARRIET E. ORCUTT

CHICAGO
CHARLES H. KERR & COMPANY
1894



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DEDICATED TO
Miss Ella L. Stevens,
IN MEMORY
OF A FRIENDSHIP WHICH WILL ENDURE
AS LONG AS LIFE SHALL LAST.

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A MODERN LOVE STORY

CHAPTER I.

THE PROPOSAL.

“I cannot love him;

Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble:

* * * * *

In voices well divulged, free, learn'd and valiant,

And in dimension, and the shape of nature,

A gracious person; but yet I cannot love him.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“Esther, do you love me?”

Two people were sitting in a pleasant, cozy room, which contained, in addition to the usual furniture, an easel, a bookcase, and a piano. It bore the appearance of a room much in use.

The lady addressed was sitting in front of a small canvas, busily putting in the background. The questioner occupied a large easy-chair a few feet away. They had been talking about church

matters. Then there was a short silence while he watched her as she worked. Abruptly he had broken it by his question, which, it seemed to him, ought not to be unexpected. She did not answer for a time, but worked on. A flush stole over her cheek then faded away. If one had been near enough, one could have seen that her hand trembled and her brush no longer obeyed her will. She was daubing, not painting. He watched her until the silence became painful, and then repeated his question in the same calm, even tone.

"Esther, do you love me?"

"It seems to me that is a very peculiar question for you to ask," she replied in a tone which she strove to make as calm and even as his.

"Why? Why is it a peculiar question for me to ask?" he persisted.

"Because—you know the answer already." As she said this her trembling hand gave one vicious daub, which it would cost her an hour's labor to repair. She threw down her brushes and palette and turned and faced him. "You know that we all—like you." There was a moment's hesitation before the word "like."

"I did not say 'like', Esther, I said love."

"Well, love, then if you prefer that word. You know that we all love you, and have for years, ever since you married Jennie and became a member of our family."

"We all, then, includes the whole family?" he asked with a smile that told her she had not helped matters by her attempted evasion of the question.

"Yes."

"I don't know but that is rather inconvenient," he observed passing his hands through his hair with a motion peculiar to him when perplexed. "If they all love me, is it my duty to ask the whole family to marry me? I am not a Mormon you know!"

"How perfectly absurd you are to day!" she answered with an air of vexation although she was unable to repress a smile. "I wish you would go away and let me work in peace," she continued picking up her palette and brushes.

He rose from his chair, walked over to the piano, sat down and idly ran his fingers over the keys. "Do you love me, Annie darling, do you love me?" he sang, while the artist by the window tried to work, and wondered if there was

any way of escape from this question which she dreaded to face. Presently he came and stood behind her chair and watched her. She worked on conscious that every stroke of her brush injured the painting. Did he know it, too? If he did, what would he think? The silence was oppressive. Her heart was beating fast. What would come next?

"Very gently he took the brushes and palette from her hand, and put them aside. "I want to talk with you, Esther; never mind the work now." Then he drew his chair close by hers and sat down. She moved back a little and faced him. It was an attitude of self-defense.

"Esther, I love you, love you dearly, and I want you for my wife. You have not answered my question yet, and I must have an answer. I can not live in doubt. We are no longer children.

. . . This is a serious matter. . . . I offer you all that a man can offer, my love, my life. Will you accept? Esther, do you love me? Will you marry me?" He tried to take her hands in his, but she drew them away.

"No, Wayland!" she answered excitedly. "I shall never, never marry anyone. I do not believe

in marriage; it is so often a failure! Just think of the divorces! And I suppose all those people thought they loved each other! I do love you; I love you too well to marry you. You are my own dear brother, just as dear to me as Harry. Why are you not satisfied? If we married, perhaps in a little while we should hate each other, . . . just as so many other married people do . . . You would require a great deal in a wife. I should disappoint you and then you would tire of me. I would rather die now, than to be married to a man who would tire of me. I know what you would say; but don't waste your breath in saying it! It is what they all say—but the divorce courts tell a different story. And then even if you did not tire of me—it might work the other way! I might tire of you. I should never be content if you proved to be less than I think you. . . . If you were perfect, my imperfections would grate upon you. Don't you see—either way we put it the experiment would turn out wrong. One or both would be dissatisfied. Better death while we respect and esteem each other, than an unhappy marriage, which would lower us in our own and each other's estimation, and degrade the good which is in us."

"We are both seeking to live the ideal life," he interrupted. "Let us help each other. A real marriage is a marriage of souls. Let us work together and aid each other to rise. Esther, I need you. Help me."

"I doubt my ability to aid you. I need help myself. The perfect life—it is never reached! And then you know there are so many points on which we disagree. And besides, if there was no other reason, this one would be sufficient: I never could be a minister's wife!"

"Surely, you would not ask me to give up my pulpit?" he asked, growing a shade paler.

"No; because I think that is the place you are best fitted to fill. Although I don't believe half the doctrines you preach, I would not dare to ask you to stop preaching. I know that you are helping many people to lead better lives, and that your influence is for good. But what would you do with an unconverted wife—for that is what your congregation would call me?"

"I would convert you," he said fixing his eyes earnestly upon her. "You are not half so far from God as you imagine."

"There it is again! We should be perfectly

wretched! I have no desire to be 'converted' as you term it. I never could think as you do or as Jennie did. You would try to make me, and if you did not succeed you would be miserable; and then I should feel as if I were persecuted. If I married you I should lose my freedom of thought and action. It never would do for the minister's wife to stay at home from prayer-meeting and yet attend Christian Science lectures or a theosophy class. Think how it would sound!"

"Then the lectures and the theosophy class are dearer to you than I am? You love them better?"

"If you choose to put it that way. Freedom of thought and action are very dear to me. I will not willingly put myself in a position to lose the right to either."

"And you could not trust me?" he asked hoarsely. "You think that I would play the tyrant?"

"From the very nature of the case, how could you do otherwise?"

"I thought I heard you say not long ago that you found the doctrines of Christian Science most unsatisfactory."

"Perhaps you did; but it does not follow that

I am willing to give up my right to look into such matters all I choose."

"It is the right that you are contending for, then? It seems to me that such little matters as that could be adjusted—if you loved me."

"But you do not understand. Theosophy is not a little matter to me! It helps me to solve the problems of life which have perplexed me for years. It gives me new hope for the oppressed toilers of the world, and more faith in the final triumph of good. . . . The misery of the world lay upon me as a heavy burden. I had come to the point where I doubted God's justice. Why should one child be born to a throne, and another to a slum? Why should all opportunities be placed in the hands of one, while to the next every door is closed?"

"Such problems humanity never will be able to solve—in this life. Theosophy cannot help you there."

"But theosophy does help me right there at that exact point! Theosophy teaches that we are what we have made ourselves; that our future condition will be the result of our present action; and that justice, eternal justice, is the

foundation upon which all other laws are built. I have learned to believe in justice so perfect, so far-reaching that it includes all things that have life."

"We all believe that God is just. An unjust God is not to be thought of—it is a contradiction of terms. The seeming injustice of life is only apparent, not real. We all believe that."

"Do we? That is the point at which the skeptic first begins to doubt. Theosophy teaches that what we sow, that—and naught else—shall we reap. Our harvest, be it of good or of evil, none other can gather. If we do evil, evil will return upon us—and there is no escape from it. If we sow good the harvest will be good. The law of justice is as certain, as inexorable as the law of action and reaction. He who gives happiness to others shall in time receive happiness. He who causes others to suffer, shall not escape suffering though he fly to the ends of the universe. The evil he has done will pursue him, even beyond the gates of the earth."

"I too, believe that our future condition will be the result of our present action. But I also believe that forgiveness has a rightful place in the universe."

"The evil-doer may be forgiven, but he must suffer the consequence of his evil deeds. You tell a child not to put its hand in the fire. The child disobeys you and is burned. You may forgive the child for its disobedience, but that does not remove the pain from the burn."

"That illustration is not exactly applicable. The child disobeys me and I forgive it. But the child also disobeys the law of nature, and for that disobedience no other than the law-giver would have power to forgive. Would you say that God had no right to forgive that child?"

"Not to remove the penalty. It would be unjust to remove the penalty in one case and not in all."

"And removing the penalty would make havoc of the law, you think? The point has interest. Do you discuss such subjects in the theosophy class?"

"Yes; we are highly interested in ethical questions."

"But theosophy and ethics—I fail to see the relation between them."

"Some of our members would tell you that theosophy is the foundation upon which ethics rests.

Theosophy teaches that the cup of our life is put in our hands to fill. If we fill it with good deeds the drink will be sweet to the taste! But if our deeds be evil, then will the cup of life be filled with bitterness; and we must drink its contents—sometime. He who uses life to search for good, will find additional power to do good as he passes on his journey. Theosophy lifts our feet above the clouds of doubt and despair which enshroud the earth, and places us upon the mountain-tops where we can catch a glimpse of the very gates of heaven." She paused a moment after this enthusiastic speech, and then continued hesitatingly, "There is much that I do not understand. Very likely I never shall understand—but I could not give up studying. It represents to me what your pulpit represents to you—the highest."

"But, Esther—is it possible that you mean all you are saying? I had no idea the subject had gained possession of you to this extent! I thought it was more a literary amusement than anything else. I never dreamed that you were taking it in earnest. Of all 'isms' it seems to me theosophy contains the most absurdities. Surely you do not believe in re-incarnation and theosophy, I understand, teaches that."

"To begin with; theosophy is not an 'ism.' It would be nearer true to say it is the foundation upon which all 'isms' are built, or the source from which all 'isms' are brought forth. Think of the meaning of the word—divine wisdom, knowledge of God."

"That sounds very fine, but I looked it up in Webster's dictionary the other day, and that calls it 'supposed intercourse with God and superior spirits,' and speaks of the 'attainment of superior knowledge by physical processes.' Have you made the acquaintance of any superior spirits yet, Esther? If so, how do they look and act? How do they spend their time? Suppose you describe them for my benefit!"

"Webster was a wise man, but he did not know everything, and theosophy was one of the things which he knew nothing at all about," she answered with spirit.

"But theosophy teaches re-incarnation, does it not?"

"Some theosophists teach re-incarnation," she replied with composure.

"Do you believe in it, Esther?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Why do you decline to answer?"

"I have a right to believe what I choose."

"No matter how absurd it is?"

"What you consider absurd, I may know to be true."

"Re-incarnation for instance?"

"I did not say that, Wayland."

"But you meant it!"

"I am merely saying that you have no right to interfere with my belief."

"But haven't I a right to convince you of its absurdity?"

"You are not complimentary."

"Of its inconsistency then!"

"Do you think I wish to be convinced? Don't you see how it is? How could we walk together in peace when our views are so inharmonious? It would be better for you to marry a woman without views, than one who disagrees with you on so many points. It would be impossible for me to think as you do, and no doubt it is equally impossible for you to think as I do. We would have discussions for breakfast, arguments for dinner, and disagreements for supper. Should you require me to give up the study of theosophy

I should feel that you were interfering with my personal liberty, my liberty of conscience."

"I grant your point," he said musingly. "You have a right to study it—unless I can persuade you not to."

"But that is the exact point! I contend that you have no right—would have no right—to try to persuade me not to! The attempt to persuade would be interference with my right to do what seems to me best to do. I have the same right to have my belief respected, that you would claim in regard to your own. I have the same right to attend a theosophy class that you have to attend a prayer-meeting."

"I see," he said slowly, "I see. I had no idea that theosophy had gained such a hold on your mind. Perhaps there is more to it than I supposed. . . Good attracts good. If there is good in theosophy you will find it. To me, it seems a mere mass of ghost stories and other nonsense—but then you know more about it than I do. Perhaps I am not a competent judge. I am aware that many highly cultured men and women find it interesting or instructive or both. Let that objection pass. We will both think it over.

I acknowledge that the difficulty is serious, but I think it can be adjusted. Go on with your list of objections. I conclude you must have a list. How long have you been preparing it?"

"Wayland!" she exclaimed in a tone of exasperation.

"Esther!" he replied in the same tone.

He rose and began pacing up and down the room. She leaned wearily back in her chair and shaded her eyes with one hand, that she might shut out the last rays of the afternoon sun, which came through the window and lighted up her hair. By and by he paused at her side and stood with folded arms looking down upon her.

"Esther," he said, in low deep tones which thrilled her whole being and filled her with alarm, "I believe that you love me and will one day be my wife. Did I not believe this I should not say what I am about to say. I am going to speak of the dead. I believe that you have not mentioned your most serious objection. Pardon me, if I say the objections you have mentioned are—childish. Such matters could be adjusted. You know that I am not a tyrant. You know that Jennie's marriage was not a failure. She

was happy in her married life. You know that our love was deeper, stronger, purer, the day of her death than it was on our wedding day; and you know that we loved each other then as well as youth is capable of loving. Perhaps you think that because I loved Jennie my heart is exhausted, and I cannot love you. That thought shows lack of acquaintance with the human heart. Jennie has gone on. We both loved her and she loved us. She loved us so truly and unselfishly, that I fully believe if she could speak to us now, she would say, 'Join your lives and be happy together.' Esther, you have no need to be jealous of the dead! While Jennie lived I loved her with my whole heart. Death took her. My heart turns to you, not with the mad passion of youth, but with the calm reasonable love of maturity. You are dearer to me than any one else on earth. Is not that enough? You would not wish me to compare my love, and say that I loved you more or Jennie less. That I—"

"No, no, Wayland!" she interrupted. "You misunderstand me entirely, and misinterpret my feelings. I loved Jennie, too, and I know my sister well enough to believe, that if she thought

we would be happier together than apart, she would, as you say, bid us join our lives. But would we be happier together? That is the question! I think not. I am not like Jennie. She enjoyed housekeeping. I detest it. She had no especial love for any art except music, and in that her highest ambition was to be able to play your accompaniments. I love painting and it would be hard for me to give it up. My objections are practical rather than romantic."

"Why should you give up painting?"

"That is just a man's idea of things! Perhaps I could sit up nights and paint by moonlight! There would be no other time."

"Why?"

"Because—you are not rich. Ruby will be in school for years yet. If we married we could keep but one girl, and I would have the care of the house, and in addition would have to entertain company and perform all the multitudinous duties of a minister's wife. There would be no time for painting or music. I hate mending! I should be sure to sew all the buttons on wrong side out or upside down! I never would be able to remember how many sheets or napkins went

to the laundry! And when the girl left suddenly, I shouldn't know how to cook anything but potatoes. Could you get up a good Sunday's sermon on potatoes unadorned, for breakfast, for dinner, for supper, three days in succession?"

"I am willing to take the risk. I think I could stand the potato diet as long as you could," he answered with a smile. "You have not frightened me out yet."

"It may do to smile about in theory," she answered severely, "but in practice it would be a serious matter."

"I don't see but what you will have to attend a cooking school."

"Never! when I decide to marry, mother will teach me, and I will practice on the family. If you die of indigestion before the wedding day it will be your own fault!"

"Suppose we set the wedding day now, and you begin practicing on the family to-morrow," he said jocosely.

"I shall never marry," she replied with great gravity.

He turned from her and began walking up and down the room.

"I made up my mind on that subject years ago," she continued. "I am not domestic enough. Why should I marry? I am satisfied as I am. My class at the Art Institute furnishes me with an income which I would not like to give up. I should be sorry to be obliged to say 'Would it please your lordship to give me five or ten dollars, every time I wanted a bit of canvas or a new paint brush. I like to be independent."

"That objection has no force," he replied quickly. "Jennie had a share of our income, for household expenses and her personal use. It was as much hers as the remainder was mine. Ruby has a monthly allowance, as you know, and has had since she was old enough to know the use of money. I believe that the women of a family have as good a right to the contents of the family pocket-book, as the men. As you say, I am not rich. I have nothing but my salary, which is not princely. It is quite possible, that you might not have as much money to use, as you have now; but Jennie never suffered! I cannot promise you more than your share of all that I have. But you are not a money-worshiper, Esther, I think we could be very comfortable on my salary."

"How mercenary it all sounds! And yet—such things must be considered. We are not children. We ought to be sensible enough not to rush hastily into anything of which we would repent afterward. There is no reason why you should not continue to board with us for years. We see each other every day. I have leisure for my painting and you for your studies. You and Ruby have all the comforts of a home. Father criticises your sermons; mother looks after your clothes; Harry does errands for you; I play your accompaniments, Helen visits your sick people and helps about your charity work—we all do everything we can for you. I think you are much better off than you would be in a little, lonely, half-kept house, with nobody but Ruby and me to look after you. Why are you not satisfied?"

"Because I love you, Esther!"

"But that is no reason at all!" .

"Strange as it may seem, I prefer a home of my own. Do not think me ungrateful for all that you and yours have done for me since Jennie's death. I owe you and your family a debt of gratitude which I shall never be able to pay. Yet the little home with you and Ruby in it—"

"Would not be half so satisfactory!" she interrupted. "Be sensible, Wayland! Don't persecute me."

His countenance darkened for a moment as her last words reached his ears. He walked the length of the room three times before he spoke again.

"I thought I was doing the most sensible thing I could think of when I asked you to marry me. In what respect have I failed?" he asked abruptly, changing his tone and manner from grave to gay.

"How have you failed? In selecting me, of course," she replied, her mood changing in response to his. They had been serious so long that this lighter tone was a relief to both. "If you are in search of a wife you should have come to me for a little sisterly advice."

"Very well! I am in search of a wife. Now go on with your sisterly advice. Whom shall I choose?"

"Don't be in such haste! It is a matter for careful consideration. First and foremost, she must be a good housekeeper. Secondly, she must be able to play your accompaniments. Thirdly, she must be orthodox."

"Firstly and foremostly, then, you are out of the question—not being a good housekeeper. Secondly, how would 'Miss Rattle-Bang' do? I heard your mother say she was an excellent housekeeper. She is orthodox in her views, and she played my accompaniments last week passably well. Which reminds me, I brought a new song for you to look over. I have been asked to sing a solo over at the First, Thursday night. Some kind of a charitable entertainment they are getting up—or shall I take it to Miss Rattle-Bang?"

"Miss Rattle-Bang, as you call her, is too flighty."

"Flighty? Young and flighty?"

"Not particularly young. It is not her youth to which I object, but her giggles and general lack of good sense. It can't be that you admire her!"

"I thought it was a question of housekeeping—not of admiration. She possesses your three necessary qualifications; she can keep house; she can play; and she is orthodox. She doesn't paint and I presume she can mend. She is a member of my church and I don't think she would ever have any desire to attend mysterious lectures on strange and forbidden subjects. Miss

Rattle-Bang it shall be by all means, unless you can mention some one still more appropriate. To be sure, twenty-five may be a little young for a man with three gray hairs and a bald spot coming. But then, one can't expect everything in a wife? Have you any one else to suggest?"

"Miss DeMar."

"Unfortunately, I happen to know that Miss DeMar is already appropriated. I heard of the engagement yesterday. She is a lovely woman, and I congratulate the man who has succeeded in winning her affections. Do you think of any one else, whom you would consider suitable?"

"Not at this moment. Give me time to think it over."

"While you are considering, I will study Miss Rattle-Bang—unless you change your mind, Esther, and conclude that you will accept the vacant position and save me from the flights and the giggles of Miss R-B. You will not? Then I must console myself the best I can. The accompaniment to this song is a little difficult. I will have to see Miss R-B. and make arrangements to practice with her. Why that contemptuous frown? Are you vexed with me so soon,

when I am doing my very best to follow your sisterly advice? What reasonable creatures women are! Take them at their word, do exactly as they say they want you to, and then they are not satisfied! Come and play for me. I want to try that song we practiced last night. In half an hour the supper-bell will ring, and I've an engagement out this evening."

"It isn't here. Harry took it with him this morning."

"Never mind! We will talk then. Have you any more sisterly advice to offer?"

"None that I think of at present. If you will excuse me I will go up-stairs and—"

"But I will not excuse you. I foresee that I shall be very busy in the future. We may not have another opportunity for a long talk, and I have not quite finished. Perhaps you have not completed your list of objections. I should like to hear the rest."

"There are many other things which a woman contemplating matrimony ought to consider. You will find that the list of objections is too long to be overcome. I never hear of a divorce without feeling thankful that I am still a free wo-

man. Marriage certainly is what you and I would consider a failure, in most cases. If we loved each other less five years after, than we did on our wedding day, I should consider our marriage a failure. I have no fear that you would strike me or shoot me, but unkind words betweeen us would hurt as much as blows hurt some people."

"Esther, do you fear that I should ever treat you unkindly?"

"No, Wayland, not consciously. But there are so many points of disagreement! How could we keep the peace when our views conflict? It may be your duty to voice what you believe to be the truth, but as we see truth differently, I could not help you. I don't know but I should even tire of hearing you preach if I were obliged to go."

"You mistake, Esther! You could help me. You have been an inspiration to me ever since I learned to know you. Many a time after a talk with you I have gone back to my study and rewritten my sermon. Some of my best ideas have flashed upon me while discussing the subject with you. My verses always limp until you have applied the pruning knife. My accompa-

niments are never right until you have corrected them. Did you say I sang G flat instead of G in that last melody we were working out?"

"You certainly sing G flat, and it sounds better. The chord should be changed to harmonize with the note—then anybody can play it for you."

"You see, Esther, I need you. There are other ways in which a minister's wife can help him than by attending prayer-meeting, or doing church work. The church really has no rightful claim upon you, if you are not a church member. The church hires me, not you. You need never attend a prayer-meeting, or even go to hear me preach—until you wish to!"

"Until I wish to! That is the exact point. You would be continually hoping that I would do what I wished not to do. I should have to yield my own individuality, my own personal wishes, and live for you and your interests, or you would be disappointed in me, and the world would consider me neglectful of my duty. You would not be willing to give up preaching in order to help me paint! Why should I be expected to give up painting in order to help you preach? Marriage is not an equal partnership. The woman is ex-

pected to merge her individuality in the man's, and to give up her life work in order to help him in his. It is unfair. The woman is expected to yield everything in return for the privilege of being taken care of. I am quite able to take care of myself. Why should I marry? There is much to lose and little to gain."

"I am not a tyrant, Esther; and I have no desire that my wife should be a slave. If you wish to paint, I shall not object. I do not consider that I would have a right to object. I can assure you that I have no intention of interfering with your freedom of thought or action. When Jennie and I married we were young, and as you say, she merged her life in mine. Our characters were unformed; our aim in life unascertained. We worked out the problem together. I became a pastor, and she strove to become a model pastor's wife. She succeeded, and she was satisfied. She planned no life work—aside from helping me. It is different with you. We are both older. Our characters are formed; our work in life ascertained. You are an artist; I am a preacher. Perhaps your art is as much to you as the ministry is to me. I never dreamed of asking you to give

it up. Keep your class if you wish, and paint. The housekeeping will arrange itself in some way. If worst comes to worst we can board, although I would like to have a home of my own. There is one other point which you have not mentioned, but which I know must have been in your mind. To a woman, it is perhaps, the most important point of all, and it would be a false delicacy which would prevent me from speaking of it. I refer to the question of maternity. I believe that to the woman belongs the right to say when she shall become a mother. So on that point there could be no disagreement, for you would have your own way."

"That is a question which no woman dares overlook. The right which you acknowledge is one which every woman who has a proper respect for herself will soon claim."

"I fully realize that the woman of the future is to be a different being from the weak yielding creature of the past. She ought to be. But surely, Esther, I offer you all the freedom and independence a man can offer to the woman he asks to share his life. I am not seeking a mere housekeeper. I want mental companionship. I

want a wife who will draw out the highest and best that is in me, who will help me to rise morally and mentally; a wife who is interested in the subjects which interest me; a wife to whom literature is not a sealed book, to whom the thoughts of great thinkers are familiar as household words; in short, Esther, I want you! Now what do you require in a husband?"

"I don't require a husband! If I were obliged to invest in one you would do as well as another. But a husband is an article for which I feel no need. Was it Gail Hamilton who said that a woman should never marry a man until she couldn't live without him? I always thought it a very good rule, and shall try to follow it."

"So?" he replied, rising from the chair which he had occupied for a few minutes, putting his hands in his pockets and smiling down at her. "So! You won't take me until you can't live without me? That is the idea, is it? I accept the challenge."

He turned and walked up and down the room a few times. She thought about telling him that she had not intended it as a challenge; but what was the use? It would only make more talk,

and she was tired. So she was silent. Presently, the supper-bell rang. She rose to leave the room. He stepped before her barring the way, and took both of her hands in his.

"Listen, Esther, I am going to prophesy. You do not love me enough to marry me now, but the day will come when you will. The little differences of which we have been speaking, will adjust themselves, and the bond which unites us will grow stronger, purer and holier, as the years pass by. The strength of my love will conquer you. But I want no unwilling bride. You must surrender and acknowledge that you need me, as I have acknowledged that I need you. Together we will solve the remaining problems of life. God helping me, Esther, you shall one day be my beloved wife."

She thought for one brief instant that he would kiss her, and tried to turn away. But he dropped her hands, went out through the hall and into his study, closing the door.

She could hear the voices of the assembled family in the dining-room. For a moment she was tempted to escape up-stairs; but that might excite comment! She could get through supper some way.

She went to the dining-room. They were all talking and laughing which made it easier. Harry was relating an absurd incident which had occurred on the street. But how slow Wayland was! Would he never come?

At last! From the moment of his arrival he led the conversation. How handsome he was looking! She had always been proud of her brother-in-law—so were they all! Her father leaned upon him as upon a son. He had always been a favorite with her mother. How lonely they would be without him!

She escaped to her room as soon as possible, taking with her the canvas she had daubed rather than painted. How fortunate that it had been no farther along! Did Wayland realize what mischief he had worked with her picture? She sat down in her rocking-chair by the window and tried to think it all over. What had she done? Spoken her true thought and feeling. What else could she do? He had a right to the truth—and she had tried to tell him the truth. She had no wish to marry any one. That was the truth. Did she love him? Yes; and no. She loved him as she loved her brother Harry, but not as Jennie

loved him. Was she jealous of her dead sister? No; no! not that! She could never forgive him if he had not loved Jennie—if he ever ceased to love her. Jennie deserved his love. If she could only have lived! But as he said, she was gone.

Her memory wandered back to that evening so many years ago, when Wayland had asked her sister to marry him. After he was gone, her sister had come and wakened her, to tell her the wonderful secret.

"We are to be married after Wayland graduates," she said. And Esther, child that she was, exclaimed with all a child's impatience, "O Jennie! I thought we'd have the wedding right away, so I could have a new white dress. That's almost a year! How can you wait so long?" And Jennie answered, "I could wait forever, if I knew that he loved me." And that was love! Merely to know that he loved her, made Jennie happy! It had no such effect upon her! She had been happier yesterday than she was now. This was only another responsibility, another problem to be solved. It was true, that she should feel very lonely if she should never see

him again. It was also true that she was perfectly able to live without him. She was wedded to art, she did not wish to marry.

CHAPTER II.

THE COURTSHIP.

“On what strange grounds we build our hopes and fears;
Man's life is all a mist, and in the dark
Our fortunes meet us.
Whether we drive, or whether we are driven,
If ill, 'tis ours; if good, the act of Heaven.”

DRYDEN.

A week passed. Take it all in all it was a very strange week! To begin with, Wayland was never at home. He took breakfast early and was often gone before she came downstairs. He ate lunch in town and had begun accepting invitations to six o'clock dinners, instead of joining the family circle. He rarely came in before ten in the evening. Why did he seek to avoid her? But then, he was at liberty to do just as he chose, she remarked to herself with a proud little toss of her head. Sunday she did not attend church.

The second week passed in the same strange

way. She had not exchanged more than a dozen sentences with Wayland since the end of their long conversation. All the week she told herself that she would not go to church at all Sunday, or that she would go somewhere else. But when Sunday morning came, after a short struggle with herself, she went—not because she was anxious to see or hear Wayland, of course, but because people might think it strange if she staid away! Yet she had not been in the habit of attending his church regularly!

The third week came and went. There was no practicing together, no accompaniments to make up, no limping verses to cure, no passages from the next Sunday's sermon to discuss! When she met him in the hall or at the table, he was smiling and courteous as ever. But he asked no favors of her, and showed no inclination to seek her society. He must love her, indeed! This was a peculiar way of showing love! To avoid her society as much as lay in his power! She felt a little indignant yet would not own to herself that she cared at all. Ruby was staying with a cousin and the house really was very lonely.

The fourth week began in the same way. One

afternoon while she was at work in the studio, she heard a familiar step. Could it be possible? The study door opened and shut—it must be Wayland! Two minutes later he was looking over her shoulder and criticising her work.

"That mountain at the right is well done. It is as lofty and inaccessible as yourself! But what is this over here? That cow's tail looks exceedingly frisky. She will whisk it off if she is not careful!"

"It is not finished yet. Perhaps it will look more securely fastened when it is."

"You must have run across a most unaccountable breeze! It certainly blows these branches to the right, and those to the left! Is this to be a river down here in this corner, or the shore of a lake? I'll tell you! Just transport that cow and that breeze, cover the mountain with snow, and put in a vulture circling 'Above the topmost snowy height' and you will have something that will make one think of Verestchagin's 'Forgotten Soldier.'"

"I have no desire that my work should suggest Verestchagin's."

"What! do you not admire him?"

"Certainly; but I seek to produce upon my canvas the beautiful in both nature and art. Verestchagin loves best to reproduce the awful, the sublime, the majestic."

As she said this she put aside her brushes. It had cost her several hours work to repair the mischief she had done, during their former conversation. She had no mind to cause herself trouble of that kind again. While he talked she would make no attempt to paint.

"Tired?" he asked, glancing at her sharply. "Perhaps you would like a change of occupation. Suppose you play for me."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Not at all. Your mother gave me a special invitation to dine at home and to spend the evening with the family. I accepted, so here I am for the remainder of the day."

"It takes a special invitation to keep you with us, does it?"

"The pastor of the Fifteenth has been in great demand of late. I dined last night with the Newmarkets. Miss Newmarket is very charming. Did you ever meet her?"

"No; I never did."

"I think you would like her. She is a musician; plays anything ordinary at sight, and sings too. She has a fine voice. It runs a note higher than yours. Her people are very pleasant. I believe they call her father a millionaire. He was extremely cordial and offered me the use of his library. I think I shall accept. It is one of the finest private libraries in the city. You have heard of it?"

"Yes."

"They are evidently people of culture as well as wealth. A valuable acquisition to the congregation of the Fifteenth. Mrs. Newmarket seems to be an authority on German literature; she has full sets not only of Goethe and Schiller, but of Heine and Spielhagen and Schopenhauer and others too numerous to mention. She not only has them but she has read them, and, what was the worst of it, I couldn't mention anything she hadn't read. May I borrow your copy of *Kinder der Welt*? She mentioned something which I would like to look up."

"It is hardly necessary to ask. You will find it in the usual place on the third shelf of the book-case. Is Miss Newmarket interested in German?"

"Yes; they traveled in Europe last year and are going again next summer. She is taking languages at the Berlitz school—conversational method you know. I'd like to take a few lessons myself! I read well enough, aber ich spreche es nicht geläufig. And you persist in liking French better than you do German! How can you? French always sounds to me like the chatter of children, while German sounds strong and valiant. And then their foolish habit of tearing a little word like not, into two, and scattering it through the sentence! Their de's and a's are enough to distract the brain of anyone who strives to use them according to a Frenchman's ideas of propriety."

"The German's tear quite as many words in two as the French and are quite apt to put them even farther apart. How absurd a German verb looks with its first half attached to the extreme end of a sentence seven lines long! And I find German prepositions quite as troublesome as French. Does Miss Newmarket like German better than French?"

"I think so. But—I haven't shown you my latest, have I? It's a little melody to go with

your verses, but I'm not sure what key to put it in. When we have decided, I want you to write out the chords. Wait—I'll play it myself and sing it for you, then we will work it out together."

The evening passed, as so many other evenings had passed. "Oh, if it could only be like this always!" Esther thought. "Why could it not?"

When she went to her room that night she sat down and thought it all over. How handsome he was—for a man with three gray hairs and a bald spot, as he was fond of saying. No wonder he was a social success. No doubt all the managing mammas with marriageable daughters would be setting traps for him. But Wayland had good sense. He would not be likely to marry anyone unworthy of him. It would be very hard to see another woman take Jennie's place! It would be hard for Ruby, too! But then—she must not be selfish in the matter. He had a right to marry. She must expect that he would. The Newmarkets were charming people and Miss Newmarket was a lovely girl. She had never met her personally but she knew of her. The marriage would be very advantageous

in every respect. Miss Newmarket would have money, so Wayland could rest and travel. He needed rest. He had worked very hard all his life. A year's travel in Europe would be a great benefit to him. And then perhaps he could do what he had always longed to do—devote himself to work for the poor and to the study of social problems. Yes, a marriage with an heiress would be advantageous. Not that Wayland was mercenary! He was not! Still, wealth confers privileges. The Newmarkets were the right kind of people too! They would appreciate Wayland's talents, his position, influence and family connections. They would not look down upon him because he was not rich, like some of our would-be American aristocrats. She thought it all over, looked at it from every side, and acknowledged to herself that she had no right to complain; yet there was a certain sinking of the heart for which she found it difficult to account. The years as they stretched forth before her, looked very long and very lonely.

The days passed on much as before. They met at the table occasionally, but he made no attempt to seek her society. The Newmarkets were frequently mentioned.

"I say, Esther! What's up between you and Wayland?" questioned her brother one morning a few days later.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing! Only—I just wondered. You used to be together so much, and now he's hardly in the house long enough to get his meals."

"I suppose he is busy."

"Stuff and nonsense! Who told you that? He's over to the Newmarkets half his time."

"What makes you think so, Harry?"

"Think? Don't I know? I happen to be acquainted with Henry Newmarket. He thinks there is nobody on earth like Wayland—says they all do. It seems Wayland has been practicing duets with his sister. I thought—you might like to know," he continued slowly.

"What absurd idea have you in your head now?" she asked sharply, putting down her brushes and facing him.

"Have you and Wayland quarreled?" he asked persistently.

"Quarreled? no, indeed! We never thought of such a thing. At least I never did, and I don't believe Wayland ever has. Why should we quarrel?"

"Oh, well! it is all right if you think it is. I've nothing in particular to say—if you are satisfied!"

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"Perhaps I'd better not tell!"

"Do as you think best about your secrets."

"It's no secret. At least—not outside of this house. I heard yesterday that Wayland was engaged to Miss Newmarket. Maybe you have known it for a week or two—but I didn't. I am going down town. Anything to send for?"

"No; not to day. You brought the orange chrome last night, didn't you?"

"Yes; I put it in the case. Good-by," and he was gone.

Engaged to Miss Newmarket! Was it possible? After vowing undying love to one woman, here he was promising to marry another one in a few weeks! He could not have known Miss Newmarket to exceed three months! Men were all alike! Changeable, untrustworthy creatures! She had thought Wayland an exception, but he had proved himself to be like all the rest—un-

stable as water. Did she regret her answer? Not in the least. She was thankful that she had had strength and will power to resist a love so weak and uncertain. Men were all alike! It was not worth while that a woman should give up her freedom for such vacillating creatures! And yet—it was strange! Wayland had been a faithful husband! She pondered long, but came to no satisfactory conclusions. Men were problems whose solution no ordinary woman could figure out. Thanks to her lucky star! She was not obliged to spend her life seeking the solution to any such problem!

An hour later she went into the sitting-room where her mother was seated sewing.

"I wish you would give Wayland another special invitation to spend the evening at home with us," she said quietly.

"Do you?" questioned the lady addressed, looking sharply at her daughter. "I thought you and Wayland had lost interest in each other."

"Oh, no! he is more interested in someone else—that is all. I hear that he is engaged to Miss Newmarket. I do not like to have him think that we are—dissatisfied."

"I don't believe it."

"Don't believe what?"

"I do not believe that Wayland is engaged to Miss Newmarket. How did you hear it? He has not told you so?"

"No; I heard it indirectly. But—I think it is quite likely to be true."

"Esther!"

Esther bore her mother's searching look, with an impassive demeanor which betrayed no emotion—if she felt any.

"Nevertheless, I do not believe it!" her mother continued after a moment's silence. "I do not know what may have passed between you two—perhaps you have quarreled; but I do not believe that Wayland is engaged or is likely to be engaged to Miss Newmarket. You have not given me your confidence, and it is not necessary that you should, as you are both old enough, and ought to be sensible enough to settle your own affairs. But—" she hesitated a moment, "if you want the invitation given I will send it. What evening? Tuesday your father will be gone; Wednesday Helen and I have an engagement; Thursday is Wayland's night at prayer-meet-

ing—it could not be before Friday. I'll send him a formal invitation for Friday. Shall we invite any one to meet him?"

"No; only the family and Ruby."

Wednesday morning, when Esther went into her studio to paint, she was conscious of the fact that Wayland had not left the house. That gentleman was, in fact, sitting by his study table in deep meditation. Two notes were before him. They were both short. One was written hastily on a leaf torn from a tablet and he had found it on his bible that morning. It contained these words:

"Wayland:—I want my brother.

"Esther."

The other he had received from the hands of the postman, and it contained a formal invitation to dine with the family, Friday at six.

"Perhaps I have overdone the thing a little," he remarked to the cat on the window-sill after staring at the paper several minutes. "It hasn't worked quite as I thought it would. I'll have to try something else."

A few minutes later Esther heard a familiar脚步 in the hall. Was he coming in answer to her note?

"Oh, Esther! don't you want some work?" he asked rushing into the room tempestuously as Harry was in the habit of doing.

"Perhaps! What is it?" was her cautious reply. When Harry asked her if she wanted work it might mean a task five minutes long or one five days long. She had learned caution by experience.

"Will you do it?"

"Perhaps. What is it?"

"Could you do it now?"

"I'll see. How long will it take?"

"I couldn't say."

"Give me some sort of an idea."

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Because it all depends upon whether you know how or not."

"And you distrust my ability?"

"Somewhat."

"You are worse than Harry. He always tells me what he wants done."

"Does he? Sometimes he pays you in advance for your trouble—like this," he replied, bending over and kissing her on the tip end of her nose, in a most undignified manner.

"Wayland! How dare you!" she cried and rising from her chair in such haste that she overthrew the frail little table at her side, she faced him pale and stern.

"I was only doing my best to imitate your brother Harry," he replied meekly. "I have seen him kiss you on the tip end of your nose at least a dozen times."

The absurdity of the whole situation flashed upon her, and her anger fled, in spite of her determination that it should not.

"You have no right to treat me in this way!" she remonstrated to keep up her dignity. A strange hysterical desire to laugh was taking possession of her. And yet—she felt that she would rather die than laugh! The offense was serious and she must treat it as such. She was not a child! And perhaps he was engaged to Miss Newmarket this very minute! And yet—there was a strange uplifting sensation about her heart and she knew that he was not, just as well as if he had told her so fifty times!

"Permit me!" he said, picking up the little table and placing it in its proper position. "Three—six, how many brushes did you have?

Did this vase belong on the table or on the shelf? You should not be so abrupt in your movements. It brings disaster to your surroundings. This china cup has lost a handle. All your fault, Esther! All your fault!"

She could not help smiling at the charge. When she smiled he grew serious.

"Sit down, Esther, and let us talk awhile. I have always heard that women had a great many queer notions. One of the queerest it seems to me, is this idea of turning a lover into a brother. According to the natural law of progression, lovers evolve into husbands—not into brothers. That would be a most unnatural development, from the higher to the lower. Seriously, Esther, do you really want me to love you less?"

"That is a hard way to put it. I prize your friendship. And besides—now, Wayland! just listen and be sensible! It would be much wiser for you to marry Miss Newmarket! Just think of all you could do, if you were rich!"

"Is that your advice, Esther—to marry for money? I thought you had a higher idea of love than that!"

"Miss Newmarket is certainly lovable. I am advising you to love her."

"Which shows that you know nothing of the nature of love, to think it can be moved about from one person to another like that. When I get ready to move my affections I'll place them on a good housekeeper—according to your former advice. As to Miss Newmarket—to begin with, I have never seen her."

"Wayland!"

"Actual fact! Miss Newmarket is in Germany studying music. It is Miss Ethel who is at home, and with whom I have been practicing duets. She is a school-girl of sixteen with a most remarkable voice. They were getting up an entertainment for the Mission School and asked me to help—so of course I did. Miss Ethel, if she carries out her present plans, will be in school five or six years yet. At the end of that time she will know no more about housekeeping than you do. As you say I must marry a housekeeper, I don't see but that it will have to be—the one we mentioned before."

"If you married an heiress, she would not need to be a housekeeper."

"Then it is a question of money, is it? Esther, if I were worth a million dollars, would you marry me?"

"Don't, Wayland! It is not a fair question."

"I think it is. I want an answer. If I were worth a million dollars, and asked you to marry me, would you say yes? You and I ought to be capable of telling the truth."

"It is not a fair question, but I will answer it. No one really knows just what she would do under changed circumstances, because we change more or less with circumstances. If you were worth a million dollars, while it removed some difficulties, it would add others. The weight of my obligation to you would be increased and I should feel less free, less my own, than if I married a poorer man. If you were worth a million dollars, I should still say no."

"But if you had the million dollars, how would it be then?"

She did not answer.

"I suppose I would have no chance at all," he continued a little bitterly. "It would be all Italy and art."

She was still silent. He got up, walked to the piano and struck a few chords.

"Think I'll have to send up a tuner. A flat, is too flat. Come and play for me. Oh, I will be

on my good behavior," he added as she hesitated. "I am your lover, not your brother. I merely wished to show you that there was a difference. True lovers do not make a practice of offering unwelcome kisses. I've a great mind, Esther, I really have—to vow that I'll never kiss you again until you ask me to! Just to punish you! And if you never ask me, and I marry, I vow I'll marry Miss Rattle-Bang—so I will!"

She went to the piano. "You haven't told me yet what that work was you had for me to do," she remarked.

"Perhaps there is no use in telling you."

"There may be. Anything reasonable I will do."

"My task is most reasonable, Esther, it is only this—to love me, to love me well enough to be willing to share with me the trials and the sunshine of life."

Must it be told! It merely illustrates the contrariness of the human heart. For one swift moment she felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to lay her hand in his and tell him that she would walk through life at his side. The next moment came a revulsion of feeling. It was the

struggle of a proud woman for independence. She turned upon him almost fiercely. "Why do you persecute me, Wayland? Have I not already answered you?"

"Not satisfactorily," he replied calmly, turning over the music, searching for the piece he wanted. She began playing from a book which stood open upon the piano.

"Was it this you wished to sing?" she asked after a moment or two.

"No; page twenty-one in the folio," he answered.

The remainder of their conversation was equally prosaic. Their singing did not prove to be a success. When he left her, Esther tried to go on with her work but her hand had lost its cunning. It would tremble in spite of her best efforts to control it. At length she picked up her brushes and put aside her paints. She might as well have it out with herself now as any other time!

She went up to her room, closed and bolted the door, and sat down by the window to meditate. Was it possible that she loved him? That she would soon be as Jennie was—ready to fall at his feet and worship? Her whole life bounded by his

will? Her happiness in his control? No, no! It could not be! She must not be so weak. She had decided years ago that it would be better not to marry. She had planned her life accordingly. Art was better than marriage. And yet—marriage was not always a failure! If ever a man was worth marrying, Wayland was that man! But if she married there was so much to give up, so many risks to take! And she went all over the ground again, and proved to herself for the fortieth time in the last few weeks, that it was wiser not to marry!

CHAPTER III.

THE DECISION.

“What greater thing is there for two human souls, than to feel that they are joined for life—to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting?”

GEORGE ELIOT.

The days passed very quietly and grew into weeks. But the old frank intercourse was over. He was polite and courteous when they met, but he never asked a favor of her. Either the church organist or Miss Rattle-Bang played all of his accompaniments. Ruby was still away and the house seemed very lonely to Esther. She fell into the way of thinking of life as a somewhat dreary, never ending task. Her class seemed less interesting, her art more unsatisfactory.

Was life worth living? This question—which seldom occurs to happy people—was often in her

mind. She found it difficult to paint as steadily as usual, and what she did was often so unsatisfactory that it must be done over again. One afternoon she found her work more troublesome than usual. Was it because she was conscious that Wayland was in his study and might cross the hall and come in at any moment? He had not criticised her picture for a month at least. It was time that he did.

At last! She heard his footsteps in the hall—the door opened—it was Wayland!

"Excuse me! I do not wish to disturb you, but Helen said I would find the last magazine on the piano. Yes; here it is. I thought I would glance over that article you mentioned on my way down in the cars."

He was gone! She could hardly realize it at first, and her disappointment was keen. There he was going down the street! Tears of vexation filled her eyes as she watched him, and then she grew angry at herself to think there were tears. What folly. What weak, silly, creatures women were—and she was no better than the rest! She, a woman of some age and some sense—at least so she had considered herself—in love! She

might as well acknowledge it—to herself. She was not likely to have an immediate opportunity of acknowledging it to anyone else! She smiled grimly at the thought.

He had avoided her—except in the presence of others—ever since, for the second time, she had accused him of persecuting her. And yet—she could not doubt his love.. Almost daily he gave her some evidence of that. A bunch of roses on her easel, a sheet of music on the piano, a new book which she had mentioned, and a dozen other trifles of like import, proved conclusively that he had not forgotten her. She felt surrounded by his love—it filled the atmosphere. And yet—he avoided her! But could she blame him? She could not. She felt obliged to acknowledge to herself that her conduct had been rather trying. And he as usual had been very good and patient.

And this was to be the end of it all! She was to give up art and go and get herself married just like any other woman! It was humiliating!

It certainly was! She had expected more of herself. To tell the exact truth, she had felt herself a little superior to the average woman who married. And now—she dared deny it to herself

no longer. She loved him! She was fast getting to the point where she could not live without him! That is, live happily without him. She had never acknowledged it to herself before, but those tears which came against her will proved the case against her. She could deceive herself no longer. Had she deceived herself? Whatever she had done in the past the truth must be faced now. It would change all her life—it was not reasonable or wise! And yet—when had she been so happy as at this moment, in acknowledging her love and giving it a place in her heart? She threw aside her paints and brushes. She longed for action. The house seemed too small to hold herself and her thoughts. She would go out and walk under the free blue sky.

Another week passed. It had been a hard week for Esther. Once or twice she had tried to convince herself that she did not love Wayland, but with poor success. And he? She wondered if he knew? She wondered how soon she would betray her weakness. She even caught herself wondering if he really meant to make her ask for a kiss—just to punish her as he said. She would never do it, she resolved with a proud little

shake of her head—and then wondered if she would be able to keep her resolve. Wayland was so good and true and noble and patient! If she was weak and silly, and foolish—and very weak and foolish she felt—there was one comfort about it! Wayland was better worth loving than the most of men! Of that she was positive.

Late one evening she was sitting at the piano playing a mournful melody. The family had gone to bed and she was alone. Wayland had not come home. Suddenly she heard his footsteps on the marble pavement. He was coming up the outside steps—would he see the light? Would he come in? And if he did?—she closed the piano with trembling hands. She could not play to-night. She did not wish him to ask her. Would he come? He was removing his hat and over-coat in the hall. He must come. A moment later he entered the room. She turned toward him. Their eyes met in one long, earnest look.

“Esther!”

“Wayland!”

No other words were needed. She was in his arms and he was raining kisses on her face.

“Mine at last, Esther! Mine at last!”

"But I thought you weren't going to kiss me until I asked you—just to punish me," she said, withdrawing herself from his arms.

"I never said it! I only said I was a good mind to make such a vow! If I had, you would let me marry you without a kiss, you proud little witch you! I knew you too well to really make any such rash vow as that!"

And Esther wondered all to herself whether he was right or not. She had fallen so far from her former idea of herself that she could not say into what depths of abjectness love might not have carried her. Perhaps she might even have asked for a kiss! Dreadful thought!

CHAPTER IV.

SETTING THE DAY.

“What is justice?—To give every man his own.”

ARISTOTLE.

“It is only by labor that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labor can be made happy; and the two cannot be separated with impunity.”

RUSKIN.

“Wayland, if you were free to do exactly as you pleased, what would you do?”

“I would marry you.”

“Do be sensible—just for a change! You are certainly becoming a man of but one idea—and you used to have several!”

“Thank you for the compliment!”

“What would you do with your life if you were possessed of an income which relieved you from the necessity of ‘making a living’ as the expression goes. What would you be? Minister, author, musician, lawyer, doctor—what? Would you make your life different from what it is, if

your financial outlook was different—that is what I am trying to get at."

"If I had an assured income I would preach to the poor instead of to the rich."

"But the rich have souls."

"I know—but the rich have a thousand opportunities where the poor have but one or none."

"Do you really mean all that? Let me finish for you; therefore, God is unjust. Is not that the logical conclusion to your statement?"

"Not at all, Esther, not at all! We are far too ready to throw responsibility which belongs to us, upon God. It is man who is unjust to his fellow man. God has provided enough for all, but we have been bad children and have not divided his gifts properly. I met with an illustration the other day which was rather striking. A father placed six fine red apples upon the table for his sons to divide among themselves. Number one, the oldest, largest and strongest—after the father was gone—stepped forward and took three of the apples which he called his share. Number two and Number three each came forward and took one, which they considered their rightful share—as it would have been if the whole had

been equally divided. This left one apple for Number four, Number five and Number six. Number four fears to take all of the last apple although by equal division it would be his just share. He takes three-quarters of it, leaving one quarter for Number five and Number six to divide between them. Leaving out the question of heredity, was the father to blame because some of his children were greedy and unmindful of the rights of others? Was it his fault that the oldest and strongest seized upon half of what belonged to the whole? Or that the first four boys took possession of twenty-three twenty-fourths of the apples leaving but one twenty-fourth for their two younger, weaker brothers?"

"Leaving heredity out of the question, the father was not to blame for the selfishness of his sons. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have made the division himself and given to each boy one apple."

"But then, don't you see, he would have lost his opportunity for finding out the character of his children. He might never have dreamed of what selfish conduct his oldest son was capable. It is best that he should know, in order that he

may not entrust too much power to the unworthy."

"That argument will not hold. God is supposed to know all things without experimenting."

"Very true. We being finite it is impossible for us to find an illustration that really fits the infinite. The earth is our inheritance which God has given us. He has left it with us to divide it. Had he seen fit to portion it out to each individual a vast opportunity for the development of character would have been lost."

"Number one, if generous, would have taken but one apple!"

"If merely just he would have taken but one. But Numbers five and six have no right to charge God with injustice. God's opportunity, the greatest opportunity of all, the opportunity that counts for both worlds, is open to all. He who seeks to perfect his character will find as many opportunities, if he be poor, as he would find if he were rich. Therefore, God is just. But as I have heard you say, the roads which lead to the honors which the world confers are closed to the very poor. It was not so in this country thirty years ago, nor even twenty years ago; but it is

so now. Therefore man is unjust. He divides the gifts of God unequally and unjustly."

"When will mankind learn that justice is the first rule by which character is measured! That without justice as a foundation human merit is naught!"

"Human merit is usually a minus quantity. When the old world found the new, it proceeded to parcel it out among the nations, regardless of the rights of the possessor, if the possessor happened to be weak. So with God's gifts to man which the earth has hidden in all ages. The coal, the gold, the silver, the iron, which God placed in the earth for the use of all men, is taken possession of by a few, who use it for their individual and personal benefit. God is not responsible for this misuse of the gifts he has bestowed upon his children. The selfish and greedy who have taken possession of what did not and could not belong to them alone, are responsible. God has given us enough to make us all comfortable. I believe this is true for all nations; it is certainly true for the United States. Statistics prove it."

"Then so much the greater shame to us that

poverty still lingers within our borders. Are you sure, Wayland, that there is enough to make us all comfortable? I have so often seen the contrary stated."

"I am sure. If we divide the annual income of the United States which our workers earn, by the number of inhabitants it contains, we find that each person within our borders, is entitled to a yearly income of a little more than two hundred dollars. No one need starve on that!"

"But two hundred dollars will not support a family in comfort!"

"Two hundred dollars multiplied by the number of members in a family will keep that family from suffering. A family of five would be entitled to an income of over a thousand dollars. No family need starve on that! It does not represent luxury, but it does represent comfort. Comfort for all is certainly more desirable than luxury for some at the expense of starvation for others. At least we would be sure to think so, if we had to take our chances on being one of those to starve. Government should be instituted for the greatest good to the greatest number. Half of the boys should not be permitted to take charge of five-sixths of all the apples."

"Then there is an income of two hundred dollars for each one—whether that one earns it or not? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"But do you believe that an equal division would be a just division?"

"Certainly not! I would give the most to him who produces the most. I would not reward the idler as I would the toiler. I do not think that would be just. I believe in equal opportunities but I also believe in the right of the man to do what he chooses with his opportunities."

"People are so different, and their needs are so different, and their services are of such unequal value, that equal division never seems just to me. I should say give the most to him who does the most of the hardest or most difficult work. But perhaps when we have studied the subject more we will think differently."

"The workers of the United States produce yearly enough to furnish an income of more than two hundred dollars, for each individual within its borders. That includes the baby in the cradle and the foreign pauper just shipped to our shores. Our population increases rapidly, but

our wealth and our annual income increases more rapidly. As a nation we are growing richer every year. If this accumulating wealth could be more equally distributed it would be an advantage to us. But unfortunately our surplus wealth is piling up in the hands of a few while the poor are growing poorer and more helpless, more dependent upon the rich. Dependence is but another name for slavery. The man who is dependent upon the will of another man for his means of subsistence is not far from a slave. Just think of it, Esther. One thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine two-thousandth of our people, possess only three-sevenths—less than one-half—of our nation's wealth. Or, looking at it in another way, one family out of every hundred families, owns as much property as the other ninety-nine families, which complete the hundred. Think of the power possessed by one man who owns as much property as ninety-nine other men! You see the one man has but one family to support; perhaps only five or six people are dependent upon him, while the ninety-nine have ninety-nine families! Very likely five or six hundred people must be supported upon the same

income that the rich man uses for five or six. The children of the ninety-nine can scarcely hope to obtain the same education and moral training to fit them for the duties of life, that the children of the one obtain without difficulty."

"And thus classes arise!"

"Yes; I am sorry to say that in this boasted republic of ours the population is rapidly dividing—as it is already divided in older countries—into the classes and the masses. The classes living in luxury and comparative idleness, the masses doing the work of the nation, and living—as they can. A millionaire is more powerful than many kings used to be."

"But not in the same way!"

"Not precisely—but just think! It is said that we have at least one man among us, whose income is a million dollars per month! He could pay the salary of the queen of England four times over. She receives but three millions a year. Still that makes her quite a wealthy woman."

"It certainly does! But he is four times as wealthy, and she could hire sixty presidents and pay as high a salary as we do! And yet there are people who think our president receives too much!"

"Not while we have men among us whose income is sufficient to pay the salary of 240 presidents. I do not believe that any man has a right to an income of more than \$50,000 a year."

"It is difficult to set a limit."

"I think the limit should be less but I am positive that it should not be more. The man who possesses an income of a million a month or even of a million per year is a dangerous citizen for a republic. He has too much power. Did you ever stop to think, Esther, how much hard labor a million dollars represents? I saw it figured out recently, and the results were startling! It would take a day laborer working 300 days a year at one dollar a day, 3,333 years to earn a million dollars. Think of it! Over three thousand years to earn a million dollars by daily labor and yet we have men among us who hold possession of two hundred million or more! And these large fortunes are increasing rapidly."

"It would take farmers, laborers, mechanics and clerks a long time to earn a million dollars!"

"It certainly would. Then just think of these points. A million dollars will buy more than a million bushels of wheat. It takes the farmer

who raises five hundred bushels a year, two thousand years to raise a million bushels. It is also stated that a million dollars would buy all the stores and the most of the houses in any ordinary village of two thousand inhabitants. That makes a bad showing for the political liberty and social equality of the people who are dependent upon the millionaire for their bread and butter. To make one millionaire 999 other men must do without their share of the accumulated wealth of the nation. They must live upon their daily labor without any capital to fall back upon—and if daily labor is denied them—then what?"

"Why Wayland, are you turning socialist?"

"Not quite. I am neither socialist, anarchist, nor communist, yet I see great danger in allowing these immense fortunes to accumulate."

"How would you prevent it?"

"There are many ways; if the people, the whole people, could only be roused to a sense of the danger and would take it in hand, this evil could certainly be remedied. I think some of the labor organizations do see the danger. I wish I was better informed on economic subjects."

"Have you read that article on immigration in the last magazine?"

"Yes; there is another danger! The foreigner is becoming omnipresent. He can't read English and he won't learn, yet we let him vote. There was a Polish settlement near the farm where I was visiting last summer. Those Poles wouldn't even send their children to school—and yet the men were voters! I have no objection to foreigners, and am glad to see them come—we were all foreigners once—but I don't think they have any business voting until they can read English, and know what a republican form of government means. That is another danger ahead! The ship of state is sailing into troublous waters. I wish I knew enough to help guide her—but I don't! You asked me what I would do with my life if I could. I will tell you. If I had an income which would leave me free to use my time as I wished, I would spend it in studying economic questions, and in personal work in the slums. I would visit European cities and study the people and their needs. I would preach to the poor and live among them. Sometimes I feel guilty to be what I am, the pastor of a fashionable church. And yet the way was opened before me—it seemed God's will! What do you think, Esther?"

"I think it has been—for the past. The future may be different. But really, I do not see the connection between studying economic questions and working in the slums."

"The poor we are to have always with us, but that simply means that some people will be less fortunate than others, and will be in need of help and sympathy, in cases of illness, death, or accident. Dire poverty such as we see abroad is unnecessary. We are still ignorant of many of the principles which should govern organized society. If we were all wiser, we could guide the ship of state better. Therefore I would study economic questions, and have everybody else study them too, if I could, that we may abolish poverty. In this prosperous country, poverty should be an unknown quantity, or at least a diminishing one, instead of a constantly increasing menace. But we have discussed the affairs of the nation long enough. Let us talk of something of personal interest. When shall it be?"

"What?"

"The happiest day of our lives—our wedding day?"

"If it is to be the happiest day of our lives,

let us put it off as long as possible that we may enjoy the pleasures of anticipation. But wedding days are not happy; they are all weariness and bustle and confusion and more weariness. I fear, Wayland, that we are happier now than we ever will be again."

"So you believe in that old saying:

'Always to court and never to wed,
Is the happiest life that ever was led,'
do you?"

"I believe there is a great deal of truth in it, don't you?"

"It is often true where people are mismatched. But it will not be true with us, and need not be true with other sensible people who marry wisely. What have I done, Esther, that you should form so poor an opinion of me, that you should distrust me so?"

"It is not you whom I distrust, Wayland, it is myself. You must be a very brave man or you would never have the courage to take charge of me with all my whims and fancies! For you know, if I am not happy you will not be."

"I know."

"And you will expect so much of me, and if I fail—"

"And you will expect so much of me! And if I fail—why then, we will be two failures, and will just have to pick up our life and go on with it, the very best we can. We must help each other, Esther, so that we shall not fail. I know that I am not perfect; and I suspect that you are not—quite. But I do think that you are one of the very best women that ever graced the earth, and I think that I have lived long enough, and have known enough good women, to be something of a judge. If you loved me, Esther, as I love you—"

"That is not it, Wayland," she interrupted. "It is because I love you so well! Our ideals are high, and it is so hard to live the ideal life, the life that we picture in our visions and day-dreams. I cannot bear that you should be disappointed in me. I cannot bear to be disappointed in you. I would rather die, this moment, Wayland, than to live to find you less worthy than I believe you to be. I would rather die," she repeated with an earnestness that startled him.

"Which means, I suppose" he replied, after a moment, with that sudden change from the serious to the absurd which was characteristic of

him, "that after I have wasted away to a skeleton on a diet of cold potatoes and sour bread three times a day for six weeks, if I should take occasion to mention some morning that a change of fare might be advisable, I would come home at night and find you had committed suicide from grief, because you had married a man who had fallen below your ideal! I'll never mention it, Esther! I promise solemnly that I won't. I'll go to the restaurant and get a good dinner first! I'll agree to eat cold potatoes and salt just as long as you do! I feel perfectly safe in making that agreement, for I know you like good food properly prepared just as well as I do. And as for the house—if we have one—I expect to spoil one suit of clothes a week sitting down on paints and brushes and oils that will be found reposing in unexpected places. I expect to find combs and brushes on the parlor centre table, and ribbons and laces among my sermons—should be disappointed if I didn't. Now, when I enter the matrimonial state with such lofty expectations, in regard to housekeeping matters, don't you think it would be rather difficult to really disappoint me? I am moderately good tempered, and

hope to be able to pull up a carpet, or take down a stove—in case of necessity—without throwing a stick of wood at my wife's head. With such qualifications for a model husband—although I may not be the exact ideal of your youthful imagination—don't you think you can afford to marry me, before my hair all turns gray waiting? It is three months now since you surrendered your heart. How much longer must I wait for your hand? Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins even to the fortieth, have all given their consent. What is there to wait for? Set the time, Esther, I beg of you."

She did not answer.

"Esther, do you repent?" he asked gravely. "Do you want your freedom? Is independence and your art dearer to you than I am?"

"O Wayland, it isn't that! It is only that I am afraid—afraid that we will not be as happy as we expect to be."

"Perfect love casteth out fear."

"Perfect love increaseth fear—fear of disappointing those we love."

"I verily believe that theosophy has something

to do with your reluctance—what is it, Esther? Let us be frank with each other. Does theosophy oppose marriage?"

"Not at all! What queer ideas people do get! And yet—that is not so strange when I come to think of it! Because those who give their entire lives to research in theosophy must be free from all ties which bind them to the world. A promise must never be broken; to break it is a crime which will not go unpunished. Those who unite their lives are bound by bonds which to the theosophist are more sacred than they are to those who forget that the spiritual is far more real than the physical."

"Then those who seek what you call the highest in theosophy, are not to marry, is that it?"

"Those who leave the world and seek to lead the spiritual life, are not to marry. But there are only a few of those in each generation."

"Have you an ambition to be one of them?"

"I? no indeed! I am not half good enough. My inner senses are not sufficiently developed. And besides I am of the earth, earthy. I love my art and my friends. I am not spiritual enough to make a real theosophist. I am only a student, a learner."

"Perhaps you know what you mean by 'inner senses'; I don't. But if you are not good enough I would like to know who is! Are you acquainted with any real theosophists?"

"I think not. We are all learners. Why are you so prejudiced, Wayland? There is nothing bad in theosophy."

"Not positively bad, perhaps, but some of its teachings are certainly absurd."

"Perhaps the reason you think so, is because you do not understand."

"But it is so absurd I have no desire to understand."

"That is the exact trouble, you are prejudiced."

"Have I not reason to be when I feel that it is keeping you from me?"

"Theosophy is not keeping me from you. It is your attitude towards it that separates us."

"What is the difference when the result is the same?"

"That is not a wise question."

"I acknowledge it, but—what am I to do? Must I embrace theosophy before you will marry me? It is a most vexatious situation. Here are two people who love each other, but dare not

marry on account of—theosophy! I wish you had never heard of the stuff!"

"Wayland, you are wrong!"

"Very likely; I am discouraged and out of temper. People are apt to be wrong under such circumstances."

"Don't you see how foolish it would be for us to marry, when we can scarcely discuss this subject without quarreling?"

"I think it would be the wisest thing in the world for us to marry immediately. Then it would be in order to close the discussion with a kiss, while now you object to that method of ending an argument. Do you mean to say, Esther, that we have got to wait until I turn theosophist or you cease to be one?"

"I shall not cease to be what you call a theosophist."

"And I am equally certain that I shall not become a theosophist."

"I have not asked you to."

"Very true; so the only thing we can do is to compromise the matter. Esther, will you marry me in June? I will agree—"

"O Wayland! not in June!"

"In June I said and June I meant. My summer vacation begins then and we could have a few weeks all to ourselves, and take a long delightful trip on land and sea. You could sketch—if you felt industrious; and I could lounge, for I know I shall not have a particle of industry left by that time. I have not an oversupply now. Ruby is invited to spend the summer with her aunt and wants to go with her cousin as soon as school closes—so she will be pleasantly provided for. Now, Esther, don't try to think up objections, but just think how delightful it will be, to climb mountains together in June."

"June certainly is a delightful month in which to travel, but—"

"But what?"

"Wayland, I must have complete liberty of conscience."

"Which means—?"

"That it will be better for us not to discuss points, on which there is no hope of agreement. You must leave me to lead the religious life I prefer, and I will leave you to do the same. I will not ask you to study theosophy; you need not ask me to attend revival meetings. I will

not talk theosophy to you except in answer to your questions."

"And I must not express my religious views to you unless in answer to yours—is that it?"

"No; you have always been in the habit of expressing your views, and I have—listened. I have not found it necessary to tell you, quite every time that I did not agree with you. What I mean is, that you must not expect me to think as you do, must not feel disappointed if I always remain what I am now—"

"The dearest woman in the world," he interrupted.

"—a student of theosophy," she continued.

"We are both seeking the highest, but sometimes I cannot be satisfied with what satisfies you. You are more fully developed in certain directions than I am; therefore, although truth is one and the same, we cannot see her alike. We each obtain different views, and neither should claim to be right, to the extent of declaring the other wrong. On moral and ethical questions we nearly always agree. Those we can discuss all we please, but theosophy seems to be a point of danger; that we must avoid!"

"I have half a mind to be jealous! I believe you love theosophy better than you do me!"

"That would be absurd."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"Oh, but my exclamation referred to the first half of the sentence."

"Then you don't love me better than you do theosophy? I shall surely be jealous!"

"I love you both better than you deserve!"

"When shall it be, Esther?"

"What?"

"Our wedding day."

"I thought you said it was to be in June," she replied demurely.

CHAPTER V.

THEIR WEDDING TRIP.

“The subject of economy mixes itself with morals, inasmuch as it is a peremptory point of virtue that a man’s independence be secured.”

EMERSON.

“Are you tired, Esther?”

“A little.”

“This hill is steep.”

“Steep! I should say it was! It is a mountain! What do people mean by calling a perpendicular collection of rocks and trees half a mile high, with the smallest possible amount of path circulating up and down it—a hill! The scenery is beautiful, and I shall put that bend of the river we saw below, into the very next picture I paint. But what a climb we have had!”

“We must be at least half an hour ahead of all our companions, and I verily believe that spot of grass at the right must be the lunching place they described to us. Let us sit down and rest and

enjoy the scenery until they come. Do you suppose they suspect us?"

"Not in the least—unless it is that young couple. She regards me with a suspicious glance occasionally. I haven't anything unusual about me; my traveling suit is certainly very plain and unobtrusive. I don't see why they should suspect us, unless it is because you will persist in carrying my fan and parasol when there is not the least necessity for it."

"I will desist if you think the act arouses suspicion. Sometimes it is as difficult to hide happiness as it is to hide misery. The world would rather laugh at us than to weep with us."

"But I don't intend that the world shall do either!"

"Esther, I want you to confess."

"Confess?"

"Yes."

"Confess what?"

"Confession they say, is good for the soul. When will you ever have a better opportunity? I want you to confess every art and wile which you used, to lure poor unsuspecting me into the dangerous pitfall of matrimony—every last wile you must confess."

"Wayland!" reproachfully.

"Will you confess?"

"I never lured you! And I haven't a wile to confess! You lured poor unsuspecting me."

"If you'll confess, I will."

"I've nothing to confess!"

"O yes you have! There is a world of things I want to know about."

"Did anyone ever remark that men were not curious or inquisitive? Do you see with what a peculiar effect the sunlight falls on the leaves of that tree fifty feet below us? And how it dances on the water beyond? You should be observing the beauties of nature!"

"I can do that after the others come, but I want to talk to my wife now—she looks very pretty when she blushes—as she does when I call her wife. Esther, I want to know exactly when you surrendered. When did you give up that you would have to marry me?"

"But you are confessing—I am not."

"You must help me. Do you know what I was going to do, that night, if you hadn't fallen into my arms?"

"Wayland!"

"Never mind. We won't stop to quarrel about that. I was almost at my wit's end. I had tried Miss Newmarket and jealousy and it didn't work at all. I don't believe there is a jealous hair in your head. But I wish you would tell me just how you felt about that episode. Honestly, Esther, wouldn't you have been a little sorry if I had married Miss Newmarket? Just a little?"

"Do you really expect me to answer that question?"

"Yes."

"It would have been hard for me in some ways—hard to see another woman take Jennie's place. But really and truly, Wayland, I did think it was the most sensible thing you could do! I supposed, of course, that it was Miss Newmarket—not that child. She is of suitable age, and a lady in every sense of the word. And then—her money would have made life so much easier for you. Still, I did think you were very flighty, and changeable-minded after you had been vowing to love me all my life, to go and get yourself engaged to some one else in just a few weeks. I am willing to acknowledge that I hadn't much of an opinion of men just then!"

"I suppose you waited until you had a better opinion of mankind in general, before you concluded to surrender yourself to the tender mercies of one."

"When I found that you were true and faithful I did have a better opinion of mankind in general."

"I verily believe you married me just to rescue me from the clutches of Miss Rattle-Bang—not that I was in the slightest danger," he added in a bantering tone.

"I never for a moment imagined that you would marry Miss Rattle-Bang."

"Because she was engaged more than a year ago to that man from Tennessee who is so weighty—not mentally but physically. Miss Rattle-Bang herself is a woman of weight—great weight. But then she is a good housekeeper."

"I did not know she was engaged."

"I thought not. I am to perform the ceremony a week or two after we get home. I was asked about a year ago. The circumstances were a little peculiar."

"O, Wayland! what a cheat you are! To try to make me think you were interested in her when

you knew all the time she was engaged! And then—how did you ever manage to get that report started that you were engaged to Miss Newmarket?"

"All is fair in love and war, they say. That report was started for Harry's benefit. Nobody else believed it—that knew us. But it didn't have the desired effect, so I had to try something else. You were very hard-hearted, Esther."

"You have not told me yet what you were going to do that night."

"Haven't I? I had been at considerable trouble to concoct a scheme from which I hoped much. Sometimes you know, we fail to appreciate a thing until we are about to lose it. You had persistently shown great lack of appreciation of my society, so I decided to deprive you of it for a time. I had a call from a church out West in my pocket. I was going to show you the letter and ask your advice about it. If I thought from the looks of your face that you would tell me to stay, I intended asking you to decide for me. Otherwise I should have left the city for a few weeks and have left you in suspense. But—as you fell into my arms—without being asked—

why do you look at me so reproachfully? Isn't it true? If you think it would relieve your mind any to pull my hair, be sure you pull the gray ones! As you fell into my arms of your own accord—it was not necessary. Now really and truly, was it not of your own accord? Was not that the exact place where you wanted to be? What a proud woman you are, Esther! When you are thoroughly beaten why don't you give up? I would like to know, I would really like to know, just when you did acknowledge to yourself that you would have to surrender? When was it, Esther?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"Do you remember that afternoon when you came into the parlor for a book?"

"Yes; but I hardly said a word to you!"

"That was exactly it! If you had stopped and talked, and asked me to marry you, I presume I would have said no. But when you went out without hardly a word, and when I saw you walking down the street away from me—it came over me all at once! Suppose you should stay away and treat me like that all the rest of my

life—only an occasional word when we happened to meet by accident. Somehow, I found out just then and there, that I couldn't very well live without you."

"And I never knew it for more than a week! A whole week's happiness lost right out of our lives!"

"No; it was better as it was—because I had to think it all out again and again. I had found out what it was to love—but it only made me more afraid. I am almost afraid even yet! If either of us should prove less worthy than the other thinks us—"

"You unpractical darling! Stop theorizing and live. We will both do the very best we can to make each other happy, and when our tastes are similar and we are united by a love that is strong unto death, nothing can disturb the harmony of our lives."

"Are you sure, Wayland, very sure?"

"Yes, darling, I am sure."

"I have a confession to make—sometime. But it is not of an art or a wile to lure you. Really, Wayland, there is some satisfaction to me in the thought that if our marriage should prove to

be a failure, the most of the responsibility rests with you."

"I accept it. Now for your confession. I shall remember the past and be very hard-hearted."

She hesitated.

"What have I ever done, Esther, that you think me such a bear?"

"It isn't that—but I don't know quite how to begin. Wayland, if you could do just what you pleased for the next two years, what would you please to do?"

He did not reply at once, and she continued:

"And then, if—afterwards, you could do as you pleased with your whole life, what would you do? I mean if there was no question of money to disturb you, if we had enough money so that you wouldn't have to think about that. If you could do as you pleased, what would you do?"

"Dreaming again, Esther? Well, I suppose a wedding tour is the proper time to dream—if ever. If I could do just what I pleased, I would do as I told you a few weeks ago when you asked me that question. I would visit all the great cities and examine into the condition of the poor.

I would give my time to the study of the social problem in the new and old world, until I felt as if I understood it. And then, I would work in the slums. I do feel sometimes as if my call was to the poor instead of to the rich. If God should put an opportunity in my way that would permit me to devote myself wholly to the cause of the poor and ignorant and degraded, I would gladly accept it. I would like to help lift the lowest to a higher level. I wonder sometimes if I have not made a mistake in accepting work among the rich and well to-do. And yet—that seemed to be what God meant for me. . . . But have I a right to think it was meant because it was made easy? Esther, you have probed the sore spot in my life."

He rose to his feet and began walking up and down the grassy plot before her as was his way when strongly moved.

"I have tried to follow what I thought was God's will—and yet sometimes I have doubted. The easy way is not always the right way. The rich have souls but they also have opportunities which are denied the poor. What do you think, Esther, is my call to the poor?"

"I believe it is, Wayland. I have thought so before, but I never felt so sure of it as at this moment."

"You gave that as a reason why I should marry Miss Newmarket, I believe. But that was a mistake. God does not lead us in that way. It was my privilege and my duty, to love the highest and best which came within my reach. Your influence is uplifting to me and always has been. I am a better man because I have known you."

"And I a better woman because I have known you, Wayland."

"Thank God for that, Esther! May it always be true that we shall help each other to lead better, nobler lives. Because our love is ennobling I had a right to you if I could win you. Esther, if the path opens before us which leads to such work, even though it wind through the vale of poverty, I will go, and you will go with me, will you not? Together we will serve both God and humanity."

She rose and placed her hands in his.

"Yes; together, Wayland. The path is open. It has opened in such a way that it leaves me my art, and gives you your life's work. Sit down again

and let me tell you. You are so restless. Do you remember Uncle Samuel? He visited us last summer; that queer little old man who is so very rich. He thinks I look like Cousin Kate, his daughter, who died a month before her wedding day. He told mother that when I married, he would give me what he promised Kate. If I married you he would give you as much as he did me. And so he has sent us for a wedding present—what do you suppose? We kept it a secret in the family so I could surprise you, and so it wouldn't get into the papers and be talked about so much. He has given us property yielding an annual income amounting to more than twice as much as your present salary. Just think of it, Wayland. We can travel the two years, and while you study poverty I will study painting. Then we can get us a cozy little home, not too expensive, and you can have some hundreds a year for your charities and slum work, and do what you want to with your time. Oh, Wayland! This, I think, is the happiest moment of my life, when I can give you what you want—the chance to choose your life's work."

"Surely God has been very good to us," he an-

swered after a moment's silence in a voice broken with emotion. "He has given me my heart's desire. He has given me more than I dared to ask for—the woman I love and the work for which I have longed."

CHAPTER VI.

THREE YEARS AFTER.

“Strong men have strong convictions, and one man with a belief is greater than a thousand that have only interests.”

JAMES A. GARFIELD.

“Esther, do you remember what day this is?”

“Our anniversary. Did you think I would forget?”

“Is marriage a failure?”

“Not always. This is the third year you have asked that question.”

“And the third time you have given that answer.”

“Isn’t the answer satisfactory?”

“It lacks enthusiasm.”

“Oh! you are fishing for compliments, are you? I gave you so many on your birthday that I fear my supply has run short.”

“Honestly, Esther, I would like to know if you

are satisfied," he said in a serious tone to which she replied as lightly as before.

"As if I should tell you if I were not! Satisfied! Who could be other than satisfied such a perfect day as this! I hope we will have just such weather for our trip. I wish we could have started to-day. It is pleasanter than it was three years ago. Do you suppose everybody in the cars, and at the hotel, recognized us as a newly married couple that day? It was a happy day in spite of my forebodings to the contrary; every thing went off very well—including the rice they put in our umbrella. You remember we never opened our umbrella until on our way home. Then we were out on deck watching a storm come up, and you opened that umbrella and scattered a pound of rice all over the Captain and the passengers. That betrayed us—I don't believe they had suspected us before."

"Three happy years they have been to me," he said slowly. "Two years of play, and one of work. I do feel as if I was doing some good in the world—helping people out of the ditch, as you express it. By the way, I must read you that last article of mine before I send it away. There

are some things in it you will not agree to—I wonder if we will ever think alike?"

"Never! Leave the article out where I can find it, and perhaps I will have time to read it this afternoon, while you are gone; and then we will talk it over on our trip."

"Esther, why don't you write? I would like to have the pleasure of criticising an article of yours."

"Would you indeed? Painting and housekeeping are all I am able to manage. You may do the writing, and I will do the criticising. Your article is on the land question, I believe."

"Yes; I have come to some new conclusions—that is new to me—and I want to see how they will strike you."

"The land question certainly is one of the great questions of the day."

"It surely is; when we stop to consider that we have men among us who are worth \$200,000,-000; and that a man worth that amount could buy about 8,000,000 acres of land at the average valuation, it is enough to startle us out of our indifference. If such a man as that should invest his fortune in farms, he would have the sub-

sistence, almost the existence of 100,000 families under his control. There is not much chance for either social equality or political liberty when the bread and butter of 500,000 people can be cut short at the will of one man."

"What is the remedy?"

"That is what we are all trying to find. The article discusses that point."

"Are you more of a socialist than you were, Wayland?"

"I hardly know—but I think not. Socialism would not solve all the old problems, while it would introduce many new ones. There are some good points in all the 'isms,' in communism as well as nationalism, in anarchism as well as socialism. You need not shake your head! There are some good points in philosophical anarchism! If we were all perfectly honest and good, and noble and true, it would work very well."

"But while the human race remains as faulty as it is at present, and is likely to be for some centuries to come, we must have law to protect the weak from the strong. The absence of law would leave us to the evils of violence, disorder—anarchy."

"Anarchism is simply individualism carried to an extreme, while socialism goes to the opposite extreme. In order to be a happy nation we must find the happy medium."

"Nationalism as presented in 'Looking Backward,' is very attractive. The only trouble is, it will not work until we are all a great deal better than we are now. I don't believe, Wayland, that there is much hope for us until we are better."

"There are more good people in the world now than ever before."

"That is undoubtedly true. Yet there are plenty of bad people—we all know that! You would not be spending your life in the slums if there were no bad people—there would be no slums."

"There are good people in the slums, just as there are bad people out of them. If everybody was just, the world would run smoother. It is this eternal 'grab-all-you-can-get' sentiment that works the mischief."

"There! you are beginning to come around to my way of thinking—that justice is the foundation upon which all else rests. When the nation as a whole is just, and every individual of which it

is composed, is also just—there will be no more trouble!"

"But when will that be? How are we to bring it about?"

"By educating."

"And legislating."

"By anything that will help to raise the standard of morality. Just laws will help, while unjust laws hinder. An unjust law tends to lower the respect of the people for all law. Better no laws than bad laws."

"That is what the anarchists say. Look out, Esther, or you will be talking anarchism."

"No; I want laws, but I want good laws. What I mean to say, is, that even good laws cannot do everything. We must have good people behind them; therefore, education is more important than legislation. Your inheritance taxes, and graduated income taxes, and government control of mines and means of transportation, may serve a good purpose in keeping down immense fortunes so their owners cannot do quite so much harm, but they will not abolish poverty."

"What is there that will abolish poverty?"

"I believe that universal moral education will

do it, if it is ever done. I see no other way. That seems to me the first and most important step to take."

"But while you are educating the children what will become of the parents? What will become of the country?"

"I would educate the parents. They are often in greater need of education than the children."

"Education is all right but it is so slow. Legislation will reach some wrongs quicker."

"But you can't legislate justice into a man's soul and make it the key to his life. Unjust men make unjust laws. Think of the vicious legislation, financial and otherwise that has been inflicted upon us during the past thirty years. We must elevate the individual if we would elevate the nation. Therefore personal work like yours, does more good than all our pretty theories."

"Have you read those *Looking Forwards, Backwards, Further Backwards, etc.*, that I brought home?"

"Yes; I have read them all. None are equal to Bellamy's, although the one describing the Chinese invasion was quite good. It shows the

weakness of a nation which fails to prepare for war, and makes plain the fact that no nation can get very far above the lowest. While there is one warlike people in the world, all other nations must be able to defend themselves. If we wish to rise as a nation we must help our brother out of the ditch. When we are all out of the ditch we will be able to take another step forward. If we would rise, we must be willing to serve like the traveler from Altruria."

"The world is moving, Esther. It is moving in the right direction, and it is moving fast. There are evils to be remedied and much hard fighting to be done, and when we look upon the dark side only, it is very dark. Nevertheless, the public opinion of to day requires a higher standard of morality for both men and women than was ever before required. That is a movement in the right direction which promises everything. We are rising."

"You always were an optimist, Wayland."

"And you too, Esther. You cannot deny it. That is one point on which we agree. Let us be thankful that there is one point."

"That sounds as if we usually disagreed."

"We do—on the most important subject of all, the subject of religion."

"I fear that we shall have to continue to agree to disagree on that subject."

"Is your belief no nearer mine than it was three years ago?"

"I hardly know. I feel now as I felt then—while I was in my senses—that I never could have filled the position of wife to the pastor of the Fifteenth, acceptably. Creeds are so narrow and the universe is so wide. I cannot think as you do, Wayland. I never shall. It would be going backward. It seems to me like this; my God is greater than yours. And yet—I am in sympathy with you because I know we are both seeking the highest, and that your best thought and prayer reach up towards the same God I am seeking. Some people's prayers are so selfish, so childish, that I can have no more sympathy with them, than with those creatures who fall down and worship sticks and stones. And yet—in another sense I sympathize with all who are reaching toward what is above and beyond them. The worshiper of sticks and stones is doing that as truly as you or I. We are all seeking for the

highest and best which we are able to comprehend. I know, Wayland, that you regret that our religious experience is so different. Perhaps you feel that I have no religious experience, because you have not succeeded in 'converting' me—as the expression goes. We shall have to agree to disagree. Only—don't worry! It is all right. There is nothing to worry about."

"I do not worry, Esther, in the sense which you mean. You have had your freedom have you not, perfect freedom of thought and action? At least I have meant that you should. It is a tender point this that we have brought up. I often wonder what is my duty . . . and have wondered how you felt . . . I am glad that you have told me what you have . . . I pray God that some day we may see alike. Until then—I will be patient. I will not persecute you, Esther, or strive to force my convictions on you against your will, of that I am resolved. I trust that it will all come right in God's own time."

"It will, Wayland, so you see you don't need to worry ". Then she added in a lighter tone, "I never could quite make up my mind who presented us with that rice—whether it was Helen or Harry, or your sister Clara—do you know?"

"I am no wiser than you. But, Esther, you are not looking well. What is the trouble? Are you worrying about anything?"

"Yes; the rays of sunlight, striking the clouds over the right spur of that mountain to the left of my picture, are worrying me. I can't get the right effect. I lay awake an hour last night studying on that, while you slept as if you had never known a trouble!"

"You look so worn out. You are pale, and the rings are almost ready to fall off of your fingers, you have grown so thin. What is it?"

"I am tired. I have been painting too steadily. I really do need a rest. I think our lake trip will do me good. Perhaps I am pining of neglect. I don't think you have kissed me more than thirteen times to-day, and it is our anniversary too."

She put her hand up to ward off a kiss which he was near enough to offer; but he made no such attempt to her surprise. She glanced at him sharply.

"Esther, I wish you would tell me whether you are satisfied," he said very seriously, but she would not be serious.

"Satisfied! What an absurd question! It

shows your lack of knowledge of human nature! Did you ever in all your life hear of a mortal woman who was satisfied? I never did. What time did you say our train starts to-morrow?"

"You are a proud woman, Esther," he said a little sadly. "I don't know as I shall ever understand you—quite. The train starts at four in the afternoon. I cannot very well be back much before that, but I suppose you will be all ready. Have the valise packed and your wraps on—there isn't much time between trains. Which reminds me that it is time that I was going or I shall lose this one—and that would be unfortunate. My satchel is in the hall you said. I believe I am all ready, when I get my hat." He had been gathering up his belongings while he talked. Now he came and stood by her chair until she looked up in his face.

"Esther, do you love me?" he asked gravely.

"Wayland, do you need to ask?" she answered.

He bent down and kissed her, then turned and left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

"IT IS BETTER THAT WE SHOULD PART."

"Of all the agonies in life, that which is most poignant and harrowing, that which for the time annihilates reason, and leaves our whole organization one lacerated, mangled heart, is the conviction that we have been deceived where we placed all the trust of love."

BULWER LYTTON.

The next day at twenty minutes to four, Wayland ran up the steps and hurried into the front hall calling, "Esther! Esther! The hack is at the door and we will have to hurry. Where are you, Esther?"

He received no reply. He looked into the parlor but there was no one there. The library was empty, also the room which she called her studio, and which he called his study. What could it mean?

"Esther! Esther!" he called again. Nobody answered. At the foot of the stairs, as he was about to go up to their room he met the middle-

aged woman who acted as housekeeper of their small domain.

"Where is my wife?" he asked hastily, "and the valise—I don't see that either."

"She went home yesterday afternoon."

"*Went home!* When did she say she would come back?"

"She didn't say—maybe she didn't know. She went in a great hurry and seemed excited. She didn't pack no valise either, except the one she took with her."

"What did she say?"

"She didn't say much of anything. She hurried so. She said she had a letter and you would find a note in the usual place."

"A note in the usual place. All right. Something unexpected must have occurred. Where is Ruby?"

"She has gone to her Aunt Clara's. She went last night after she found her Aunt Esther was gone. She seemed a good deal excited too, and acted as if she didn't know what she had best do."

"Strange! Something extraordinary must have happened. I'll see," and he hastened up-stairs,

while the housekeeper went back to the kitchen to look after the cake she was baking, as she was cook also.

The usual place. That was in a book which was left on the bible stand, or in a favorite copy of *Lucile* wherever that might be found. He searched the books on the bible stand; there was not a note in either of them. Then it must be in *Lucile*. Yes, here was *Lucile*, dropped carelessly on one corner of the bureau—and here was the note. He hastily opened it and read:

"Dear Papa:—When I came home from school I found Aunt Esther gone, so I thought I would go over and stay with Aunt Clara to night and then go to Cousin Lena's to-morrow without coming back here. It will be less trouble. I haven't quite money enough to last, so please send me some before you go away, and let me know when to come home. I shall pack the little black trunk and send it to the depot to-night. In great haste,

"Your loving daughter, RUBY."

"Where was Esther's note? He held the book up by the covers and shook it violently. Strange that it could not be found! She must have for-

gotten and put it in some other book. He picked the books up one after another and shook them. No notes came flying out. Where could it be? His anxiety and his impatience both were increasing. What could have happened? Whatever it was, it had either spoiled or at least delayed their trip. Where could she possibly have hidden that note? He opened bureau drawers and looked behind pictures. Some of the pictures seemed to be gone. Here was her work-basket containing some fancy-work, and—yes, there was certainly a note! It fell to the floor as he lifted the light filmy fabric on one corner of which she had painted a rose while he idly sat and watched her deft fingers. He picked the envelope up from the floor, tore it open and began reading. This was not from Esther—it was to Esther! What could it mean? He turned the paper over to see if she had scribbled a few lines to him anywhere on it, but he found nothing of that kind. His eye caught his own name several times on the blurred pages. It could be nothing secret, or she would not have left it here where he would be sure to find it. Perhaps its contents would explain the mystery of her action. Should he

read it? Yes; they usually read each other's letters. Why should he not read this? Was it a premonition of its strange contents that made him hesitate, and caused a cold chill to pass over his body as he made the decision. He wondered about it in after years.

He stepped to the window and raised the curtain. As he read his face grew stern and pale. Who had dared write such lies as this to Esther? What could be their object? Was it to revenge themselves for some fancied slight? Or was it part of a plot to obtain blackmail? But it was too absurd to have any hope of success! And yet—as he read on he saw that it was cunningly devised, by some one who had considerable knowledge of his movements; the writer had concocted a reasonable-sounding story which, if true, would prove him to be a hypocrite, a deceiver, a thorough-going scoundrel. He smiled as he finished reading the letter and tossed it carelessly into an open box. He must find Esther's note. He took up the work-basket and searched its contents. There was nothing there. He opened every box, lifted and shook every book, looked in the bureau drawers again, and

behind every picture. He even picked up the rugs and shook them, and shook out the folds in the lace window curtains. No, it was not there. Where could she have put it? How stupid of him! Probably she had left it downstairs in the studio. He hurried downstairs and began the search there. He went through the same process, but found nothing. He looked in the parlor, in the hall, everywhere. He went to the kitchen and interrogated the housekeeper again, but with unsatisfactory results. Passing the parlor window he noticed the waiting hackman playing with his whip and watching the door. He went out and paid him and told him that his services would not be required.

He came back into the house and stood in the hall a few moments at a loss what to do next. He was struggling with a terrible fear. *Could it be possible that Esther believed what was in that letter!* His face darkened at the thought. No, no! it was not possible! She knew him too well. She loved and trusted him—but did she love him? She had been a faithful wife, faithful to every duty, but—since the day after they were married, that day when they had knelt together

to thank God for his goodness to them, she had never said in so many words, "Wayland, I love you." He often asked her, but she never answered. She always put the question aside in some playful manner as she did yesterday, or if he pressed it upon her, she would say as she did then: "Do you need to ask, Wayland?" And the answer with its accompanying look—which surely bespoke love—had satisfied him, almost—but not quite!

Was it possible that she had ceased to love him? That she was living on and on, regretting her marriage, yet trying to do her duty, trying to conceal her lack of love, so that he might not know—so that he might be happy? And yet—it could not be! Such a life would be torture to a sensitive woman like Esther. She would find it unendurable. Then came a sudden revulsion of feeling. She loved him! Why should he doubt it? What reason had she ever given him to distrust her love? None! none at all. He was foolish to torture himself with these doubts! It would be no more possible for her to believe evil of him, than it would for him to believe evil of her. People might write him a thousand letters against Esther, and it would not cause him to

doubt her for one moment. The note she had left was mislaid. There was no use in wasting any more time looking for it. He would go to her mother's and see what had happened. Perhaps some one was ill. But then—she might be on her way back and might come in at any moment. It would be awkward to go there and find that she had probably reached home a few minutes after he left the house. It would be as well to wait. If she needed him she would send Harry after him.

He walked slowly and thoughtfully up the stairs. Perhaps he could think of some new place to look for the note. As he stood gazing meditatively around the room, his eyes fell upon the open box in which he had thrown the letter. He took it up and examined the envelope. Strange! it was dated four days back. What could that mean? It must have been in Esther's possession two or three days at least. She had never mentioned it! It was certainly strange. Why had she not said something about it? A scene at the breakfast-table one morning flashed upon him. She had displayed an unusual interest as to his whereabouts the day before. She had questioned

him until he had laughed at her and told her if she would furnish note-book and pencil he would jot down the number of places he visited and the exact number of minutes he stayed at each place. Her face flushed a little and she changed the subject. He opened the letter and began reading it more attentively. Here was something he had not noticed before written at the bottom of the page.

"If you want to know more about it, meet me at the corner of 15th and M—street, to-morrow at three o'clock."

To-morrow at three o'clock! He looked at the date. That must have been Tuesday afternoon. It was Thursday now. Another scene flashed into his memory. Tuesday night as he was walking home he met a friend on the street. In the course of conversation the friend mentioned having met Esther and another lady on 15th street. She had believed the vile story and had gone to obtain further evidence of her husband's guilt! He felt as if he had received a blow, a heavy blow. He sank into the nearest chair. Esther believed him a villain! He sat as one dazed for a long time. He would have trusted her to the ends of the earth, but she—!

His thoughts became disconnected. He felt as if he was losing possession of himself. It could not be true! There must be some mistake! What was that white edge peeping out from beneath the table-cover? Surely it was a note? He grasped it eagerly. Yes; it was Esther's handwriting. He opened it and read. It contained only these words.

"Look in the work basket."

He crumpled the paper in his fingers, cast it on the floor and put his foot upon it. *She believed it!* She had placed that letter there for him to find! That was her note—her last word to him. She had gone—what did she take with her? He opened the closet door. The valise was gone. Several of her dresses were gone. Why had he not noticed before? The room itself had an empty look. She had taken down her favorite pictures. Slowly the meaning of it all dawned upon him! She had gone! She had left his home—forever. A feeling of rage took possession of him—such a feeling as he had not known for years; such a feeling as proves us akin to the lower animals. It was such a feeling as makes murderers of men who are in the habit of yield-

ing to their brute instincts. He felt as if he wished to strike something, or to tear something in pieces, and the utter folly and childishness of the act was all that prevented him from dashing the work-basket to the floor and trampling upon its contents. He was in no mood to reason. He could only feel. The world seemed tottering beneath him. The very foundations were breaking loose. He hardly knew whether he was a man or some wild beast of the forest torn with contending passions.

It was a warm June day. The air in the room seemed suffocating. Mechanically he went to the window and threw it half way up, then leaned against the casing and breathed heavily. A looker-on would have supposed him to be suffering physical pain. Many minutes passed. They seemed like hours to him. The clock in the hall below struck five. He had not heard it strike four. He took out his watch and looked at it to see if he had heard aright. Next he took down a writing desk which they both used. He would write to her—for the last time!

He wrote like a madman—as he was. His pen moved swiftly over the paper. He did not stop to select phrases or to choose soft words.

"You never loved me or you would not have believed it! I say you never loved me! You do not know what love is. If you did you would not have believed that lie; you would not have deserted your husband without giving him a hearing. Because you never loved me, it is better that we should part. You have done wisely in putting miles between us. I have suffered enough at your hands. I hope never to see you again. To think that you would not only go yourself, but would take another woman with you to help you publish your husband's guilt! To think that you would take another's word rather than mine! Oh Esther! I loved you so! I thought you loved me! How I have been deceived in you! I thought you spotless and pure, but if there had been no capability of evil in you, you could never have believed such things of me. If one had come to me with such a tale of you I would have laughed him to scorn! I could have believed that the sun was black, that the moon had turned to blood, or that the earth had ceased to move, easier than I could have believed evil of Esther, my wife. And now—you have fallen so low in my estimation I could almost—nay, I

will not write it! Even now I could not believe evil of you. My God! Esther, what were you thinking of to go there and talk to that creature? Did you think me the worst hypocrite on the face of the earth? You never loved me! If it were in my heart to hate anything, I could almost hate you!—you have deceived me so!"

He folded, sealed, directed, and stamped the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then he took his hat and started out to mail it, making calculations as he walked. If he put it in the mail box it was so late that it would not be collected that night. There was a postal station a few blocks away. He would take it to that. Then it would reach her by the first mail in the morning at about nine o'clock—if she was still at her mother's. Perhaps she was not. If she cared to avoid him she would go somewhere else. He walked to the station and mailed the letter.

What next? Should he go home? He had no home! There was an empty house and a supper-table perhaps—but it was no home! Esther was gone; even Ruby was gone. Poor Ruby! If she knew, how she would dread to meet him! He could not go back there. Besides, he felt bet-

ter out in the open air under the blue sky. God was left. He had almost forgotten that. God made the country! He would go there, out in the woods where there was peace and quiet so he could think. He was tired of men and women. He was tired of the noise and confusion of the city. He turned his footsteps toward a distant railway station and boarded the first outgoing train. When the conductor asked for his ticket he handed him a silver dollar.

"As far as that will take me," he said.

The conductor, who had seen much of life made no comment but handed him a ticket and two cents in change, and went on. The passengers chattered like magpies. He watched them with idle curiosity. What else was there to do? His brain was on the point of refusing to act. Would they never reach his station? It did not occur to him that he could get off at any other.

At last! He wondered what the place would look like. It was a very small country town situated in a farming community. At the end of ten minutes he had left it far behind him, and a turn in the road and a small hill hid it completely from sight. The sun was near to setting. Houses

were scattered. It was milking time and the cows were wending their way homeward, sometimes driven by children or dogs, sometimes going of their own accord. Here was an orchard; and there, beyond a meadow, were tall trees. He would go there and rest under them. How calm and peaceful it all seemed. Even the rail fence which he jumped had a friendly look as if it did not intend to obstruct his passage. A squirrel paused on the top rail of the next fence and chattered at him a moment, then leaped down and disappeared in the tall weeds. A bird flew up out of the long grass just ahead of his feet. He stopped and searched for its nest but did not find it. How cool and shady it looked in the woods! God made the country. Here ferns were growing at the edge of the woods by the side of a small running brook. Then there was a strip of tall bushes; every branch of them seemed to cling to the passer-by. Farther on there was a grassy plot. Fallen trees and stumps offered a choice of seats to the weary traveler, but he placed himself on the grass in preference to either.

Three hours later he was still there. The sun

had gone down and the stars had come out. As he sat there, slowly and silently his foolish rage passed away, and the peace of the universe filled his soul. He wondered at the fury which had possessed him a few hours before. He had dared to blame Esther, because she had not trusted him when appearances were against him. But how much better had he done? He had failed to trust her when appearances were against her! He would go and find her in the morning and explain everything to her—if it needed explaining. The longer he thought about it, now that his brain was clear, the surer he felt that there was some mistake. Esther loved him. Esther loved him! Here under the stars, alone with God and his own thoughts he could doubt no longer. If she loved him she trusted him. There must be some other explanation for the strange incidents which had occurred.

He felt very weak and tired, not inclined to move. It would all come right in the morning! It was so peaceful and pleasant here he could not bear to get up and go back to the city—yet. He took his hat for a pillow and laid himself down on the long, soft grass, and looked up at the stars

through the leaves of the trees. It was such a grand universe, such a beautiful world! How Esther would enjoy this view of the heavens and the earth, with the soft moonlight falling through the leaves. If she could see it as he saw it now, she would want to paint that group of stately trees. They stood like proud sentinels, watching over the safety of the humble ferns growing at their feet, and the shimmering brook beyond. Thinking of Esther and her work he fell asleep and dreamed that she was painting the most magnificent picture he had ever looked upon—a moonlit forest scene. He was awakened by soft drops of rain falling upon his upturned face. It was only a summer's shower, but rain is usually wet. He sat up and tried to look about him but it was very dark. He could not for a moment, recall his whereabouts. He felt in his pockets for a match. He had none. The moon had hidden her face behind clouds. The shower was accompanied by slight gusts of wind. He rose and shook himself and wondered what time of night it was, and what he had better do. He felt chilled and stiff as if he might have taken a severe cold.

The situation was decidedly unpleasant, for it

was so dark he would probably run against half the stumps and trees in the woods, trying to get out. However, it was only a shower and would soon be over. Possibly the moon might show her face again. Mother Earth was certainly a very capricious hostess. If only the clouds had not taken a notion to weep! The stars had been very friendly but the clouds had proven themselves most inhospitable to treat a man dependent upon them for shelter like this! Extending his arms he groped his way to a tree near by whose branches were so thickly covered with leaves, that scarcely a drop of rain reached him, except what was brought by the wind. Herc he stood and shivered and meditated until the shower was past. Was it midnight, or three o'clock, or later still? He had no means of calculating, as it was too dark to consult his watch. As soon as it was light enough he would find his way out of the woods, take the main traveled road and walk until he came to a station and take the first train to the city. He was anxious to see Esther and find out what really was the trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT'S ADVENTURES. TRAMP, ROBBER, MURDERER —WHICH?

“Whence, and, oh heavens! Whither?

CARLYLE.

“The threads our hands in blindness spin
No self-determined plan weaves in;
The shuttle of the unseen powers
Works out a pattern not as ours.”

WHITTIER.

Suddenly, the memory of the letter he had written and mailed in his angriest moments, returned to him. The storm of passion which had swept over him, had so exhausted his brain, that memory refused to act in her usual methodical manner. This most important incident had slipped out of his thought for hours. What had he written in his madness? He scarcely knew.

Esther was a proud woman. Would she ever forgive the cruel things he had put in that letter? He could almost see her grow pale as she

read it. And then she would say: "If that is the way you could feel toward me, for even one moment, you are quite right. It is time that we should part." There would be no angry words, and no tears—Esther was not given to tears! But a firm resolve which nothing could move. He must see her before that letter reached her.

It was very dark but he dared not wait for light, lest it might be too late. He must catch the very first train that went to the city. He stumbled along, groping his way, running against stumps and falling over logs; picking himself up again, and hurrying on, with the earnest hope that he was not penetrating deeper into the woods. At last he could see a fence, and an open field beyond. It was a rail fence with a pile of stones in the corner, but it was so dark that he had no idea of the nature of the ground on the other side. As he undertook to swing himself over it, the top rail broke with his weight, and he slipped and fell head foremost, into some dark, slimy water. To say that he was surprised is a mild way of describing his bewildered mental condition. With some difficulty he climbed up the steep, slippery sides of the ditch into

which he had fallen, and felt of his head to see if it still remained with him. Next he tried his arms and legs to see if they were in proper working condition, as judging from his sensations while falling he might be in several pieces scattered in various directions. All there but his hat! That had evidently stopped in some other place. He could see nothing of it; it was so dark he could scarcely see the outlines of the ditch. Oh, for a little light! What should he do? If he wandered hatless through the country, what would people think of him—when it was light enough so they could see him? What would Esther think, if she could look at him now. He smiled grimly at the thought and was thankful that Edison had not yet invented anything that would make that possible. He would try to get out of the woods before Edison made such an invention. For aught he knew, he might be ten miles from a place where he could buy a hat. And again it was doubtful whether he had money enough with him to buy one and pay his car-fare back to the city. His daily work brought him into contact with so many disreputable characters that he seldom carried much money. That

hat must be found! He started to clamber into the ditch again, and when half way down the bank he felt his hat under his foot, it gave him the first pleasurable sensation he had experienced for many hours. He climbed out of the ditch in quite a happy mood—speaking comparatively.

Without further accidents worth mentioning he succeeded in regaining the traveled road. Whether he had gone through the woods and come out on the other side, or whether he had come out near where he entered, it was impossible for him to tell. He had found a road and he would follow it, it mattered little which way. It must lead somewhere. He stepped into the wagon track and followed it as well as he could, but it was not growing lighter. On the contrary it looked very much as if there would be another shower. He progressed slowly, and after running into the fence two or three times, learned to guide himself by the feeling of mother earth beneath his feet. The road was hard; the grass soft. The road meant comparative safety; the grass meant unexpected fence-corners and bumps and bruises. After he had walked what seemed to him like miles, a house standing near the road

loomed up before him. There were no lights in the house but he was getting so anxious as to his whereabouts, that he fumbled his way to the gate, and went in and knocked on the door. There was no response. He knocked again, but with the same result. The third time he used all his strength in the endeavor to make himself heard. A light gleamed forth for an instant, through the windows, and he heard a door open and shut. A moment later the front door was cautiously opened a few inches.

"What's wanted?" was the query from a gruff voice.

"I'd like to know where I am."

"You would, would you? Well, you are on my front door-step. That's where you are! Drunk as a lord," he muttered to himself, "and wet as a drownded rat." The farmer opened the door a little wider and holding the lamp he carried in his hand so that its light fell full upon the face and figure of the intruder, he asked, "What you here for, anyway, waking folks up this time of night? Where'd you come from?"

"The city, and I want to get back there."

"Hem! don't think anybody here will object,

do you? If you want to go to the city, what are you pounding my front door for, like it wa'n't made of wood and liable to split. You look more as if you'd come out of a ditch, than out of any other place. If you're goin' to the city to-night, you better be joggin' on."

"That is exactly what I want to do, if you'll tell me the way to the nearest station."

"Straight ahead most likely. Which way was you agoin'?"

"Don't know."

"Which way did you come from?"

"If I knew that, I would be quite likely to know which way I was going. I am a stranger and it is dark."

"You might know, and again you mightn't," replied the farmer noncommittally. "It is dark; that's so! You're welcome to the barn if you'd like to sleep there. I don't believe Miranda'd want you in the kitchen. You do look awful bad, that's a fact."

"I fell into a ditch back here a few miles. The fact is I left the train at Somerville, and walked out until I came in sight of some woods. I went to sleep in the woods and never woke up

until it rained. Then I climbed a fence and fell into a ditch that I didn't know was there."

The farmer chuckled.

"That was my fence and my ditch, but it ain't much more'n a quarter of a mile from here. You've been going right away from Somerville every step you took since you got out of them woods. You'll have to turn right around and go back."

"How far is it?"

"Three mile and a half."

"And that is the nearest station?"

"Yes; you see if you'd gone through the woods on the other side you wouldn't a' been much more'n two mile from town."

"How much would you charge to harness a horse and take me there?"

"Don't want the job. The old mare is lame, and the colt is skittish, an' I ain't got owl's eyes. There's a younger man down to the next house —maybe he'd take you. He'd want three or four dollars though, this time o' night and darker than Egypt."

"Perhaps I haven't enough money with me. Hold the lamp so I can see." He took out a

silver dollar, a fifty cent piece, and a few cents in small change.

"No; tain't enough," said the farmer shaking his head. "You better take to the barn until morning. Miranda's dreadful partikler about her kitchen. But maybe you'd look better after you'd washed. I might ask her an' see what she'd say."

"Thank you! You needn't take the trouble. If you will tell me which way to turn, right or left, after I get out in the middle of the road standing with my back toward the gate, I'll start on."

"Turn to the right, and after you've gone about a mile and a half you'll come to four corners, an' then you're to turn to the right again. That'll take you straight into Somerville, an' there'll be a light in the station so you won't have to pound no more folks's front doors down. An' say, Somerville ain't a very big place, but they've got a watchman there, an' you better look out for him or he'll run you in. He's awful hard on a man that's got a glass more'n he can carry."

"But I am not drunk!"

"Of course not! of course not," replied the farmer soothingly. "I hain't said you was, have

I? I was only givin' you a friendly hint abcut that watchman. If you'd take my advice you'd take to the barn 'till daylight. I wouldn't like to hear of you bein' drownded in a ditch between here and Somerville" and the farmer closed the door and turned the key.

Drunk! Judging by appearances was not so safe after all. Because a breaking fence rail had thrown him into a ditch, he was taken for a drunkard! Was it just that a man's character should be judged by his clothes? Not even by their quality, but by their condition? Hadn't a respectable man a right to fall into a ditch if he wanted to, without losing his reputation? Just then his foot hit a sharp stone, which pierced through the thin leather of his shoe. As he walked, the sand of the roadway pressed into the crevice and enlarged it. By and by a pebble worked its way in, and soon caused his foot great pain. He bore it awhile, then sat down and took off his shoes and socks, put a sock in each shoe, tied the shoes together, broke a branch from a neighboring bush, swung it over his shoulder and started on. It seemed to him he must have walked at least five miles, and he had seen nothing of

the corner yet! When the houses were far back from the road it was so dark that he could hardly see them. But here was a large building right on the road. Should he rout the inmates up and ask his way again? Perhaps in the darkness he had passed the corners and was walking away from Somerville instead of toward it. He sat down at the foot of a straw-stack and leaned against it to rest. He heard a rustling in the straw near by, and presently a man's form emerged from the darkness.

"Hello, pard! Where'd you hail from?"

"The city."

"Where you goin'?"

"To the city."

"So be I; but I'm goin' to take daylight for it."

"Do you know how far it is to Somerville?"

"Never heard of the place."

"I'll have to inquire at that house."

"Tain't a house. It's a barn. Don't you know a barn from a house? You ain't in a hurry, be you?"

"Yes."

"What's up? Anything in particular? Friends

on the road you'd like to avoid meeting or anything of that sort? If you want a good place to rest a day or two, where there ain't no danger of meetin' anybody, maybe I might give you a pointer."

"Thank you. I'm in a hurry to get to the city, so I think I'll be going. Did you pass any corners near here?"

"Just a few rods ahead there's four roads, a intersectin' of each other, but there ain't no store nor nothin'."

Truly this was a night of adventures. Taken for a drunkard and then for a tramp! What next? A change in the weather he hoped. Instead of growing lighter, it actually seemed to be growing darker if that were possible. Here was the road turning to the right. That mile and a half had been the longest he ever traveled. Two miles of interminable darkness—and then? Hours of waiting for a train perhaps. Why had he not asked the farmer what time it was, and when a train would pass through Somerville? This road was rougher than the one he had left. The pebbles hurt his feet. It was not so much traveled evidently, and that was strange. The nearer one

approaches a town the better the roads are usually. Walking claimed all of his attention and he ceased to moralize. He stopped thinking of anything except the road he was traveling. To get to Somerville as quickly as possible, that was the one thing to do now. To that he bent all his energies. There would be a chance to rest and plan after that. But what did this mean? There was a turn in the road! Surely the farmer said it went straight into Somerville after that one turn! Inexplicable, but a fact! The road turned a square corner. He followed it a while longer. The wind died down. The clouds grew thinner, until for a single moment the moon was visible, and then again hid her face behind a thick veil. But what had become of the road? Here was a fence across it, and a gate, and a house! Queer road! To end in a house. He must be lost. He must have turned wrong somewhere. The only thing to do was to find himself and start again. He went up to the door and knocked. There was no stir. He knocked again long and loud and then awaited results, but no results appeared. A third time he knocked but with no better success. The house was deserted.

After making this discovery he felt worse than before, but just then the moon peeped from behind a cloud for another moment, and gave him a partial view of his surroundings. He saw a house at a short distance, across what looked like a meadow. He would go there. On his way he kept a sharp lookout for fences and ditches. His feet hurt him so that he sat down on the grass and put on his shoes. When he got a little nearer, he saw that the house was a barn, but there was a house just beyond. To avoid climbing fences he would go around a little low building which seemed to be fenced off by itself. Just as he passed this building, a shot rang out upon the air. It sounded perilously near. He stopped still, not knowing what to do, with every sense alert. Was it midnight robbery or murder? And had he come in time to rescue the victim? A man, with a gun in his hand, stepped out from behind a corn crib.

"Waiting for me to get another shot at ye?" he asked, raising his gun as if about to shoot.

"Hello there! What are you doing? Put down that gun."

"Well, if you ain't the coolest, impudentest

chicken thief I ever see! Why didn't you run?"

"Put down that gun, I say! You handle it very awkwardly. You'll be shooting yourself next as well as me."

"Did I hit ye?"

"No; but what are you thinking of, to shoot at a peaceable stranger trying to find the road in this heathenish country! How far is it from here to Somerville."

"Farther'n you'll get to-night, I'm a thinkin'."

"What's the matter with all your roads? I was on one they said would take me straight to Somerville, and the first I knew, it landed me in front of an empty house. The only civilized thing I could see was this barn over here, and I started for it. I was trying to get to the house to ask my way, and you step up and shoot at me! Is that the way you treat people out here in the country."

"It's the way we treat chicken thieves."

"Can't you see that I am no chicken thief?"

"You don't seem to have no bag, but maybe the other feller has got that. Where'd he go to?"

"I am alone."

"Maybe you are, an' maybe you ain't. The last rainy night we had, they took forty-two spring chickens from the next neighbor's an' I wa'n't a goin' to lose mine, just as they're ready for market. If you wa'n't into my hen-house stealing chickens I guess you can prove it fast enough. I heard 'em a squawking and come as soon as I could get the gun. You just walk along ahead there to the hen-house door and open it. I want to look inside. You needn't run, cause if you do I'll shoot. What you waiting for?" he queried suspiciously. "You needn't think I'm going to let you go without knowing."

"Very well. Anything to oblige—I'll do as you say, provided that when I satisfy you that I am not a chicken thief, you will show me the way to Somerville and sell me a lantern to find the road with when it gets lost."

"We'll see about the chickens first," answered the farmer non-committally.

"But the door is locked. I can't get it open."

"That's so! It is locked an' it ain't been open that's sure! An' I'd defy a man of your size to get into that window." He lowered his gun, examined the hen-house, took a key out of his

pocket, unlocked the door and looked over the fowls.

"Are they all there?"

"I don't miss none. It must a been the calf a routin' up that hen that's settin' in the straw-stack, that I heard. I oughtn't to have shot at ye, an' that's a fact."

"Show me the road to Somerville, and sell me a lantern, and I'll call it all square. How far is it from here?"

"Only about two miles, if you don't go runnin' up other folkses lanes. Just follow your nose and you'll get there. I've got an old lantern that I'll give ye for shootin' at ye."

The farmer was as good as his word. The road also was good, and the moon shone out, so that the lantern was scarcely needed, but our wanderer felt safer with it in his possession.

Somerville was reached without further accidents worth detailing. There was a light in the station, and a young man asleep in his chair in the office, but the waiting-room was empty. Our traveler walked in and took possession. He peeped through the half-open window at the clock. Half past two. He could scarcely be-

lieve it possible. He had looked at his watch by the light of the lantern, and concluded that it must have stopped, he was so sure that it was nearer morning. He studied the time table. The first train to the city left this station at 5:15. Nearly three hours to wait!

He took off his hat and examined it, and ceased to wonder that one man had taken him for a drunkard and the next for a tramp. The man who shot at him had not judged from personal appearance, as he was not near enough. The humorous side of the night's events had not occurred to him until now. He straightened his hat, brushed the mud from his clothes, and endeavored to make himself look as presentable as possible. In the meantime there was a sharp click of instruments, which roused the telegraph operator from his slumbers. The message he received was unusual and strangely exciting.

"Look out for a tall, thick-set man, well armed. House robbed, and woman killed. Chased the murderer two or three miles to the town ditch near Gawbles' woods, and then lost him. He may try to board a train at your station. Let us know if he does."

The same message was sent to every station for fifty miles. The operator looking up from his instrument, could see through the window into the waiting-room. Our traveler had taken off his coat and was endeavoring to remove the mud stains therefrom.

"Tall—thick-set—by Jove! There he is this minute! Looks as if he had been chased through two ditches. Cool, I vow."

After a moment's consideration, without moving from his seat, the operator answered the message.

"Tall, thick-set man, here in the waiting-room, brushing mud off of his coat. A hard-looking character. I am alone. What shall I do?"

Then followed considerable planning and counter-planning on the wires. The operator was instructed to keep close watch of the suspect, and arrangements were made to arrest him on whatever train he should take. If he attempted to leave the station the operator must keep him in sight until he could get help to arrest him. The suspect, after putting himself in as good order as possible, went up to the office window to have a chat with the operator, to help the weary hours along.

"The coolest desperado I ever saw," was the operator's thought. "Hope they'll get him!" The conversation was not a success.

The outward bound 4:30 train passed, but the suspect only went out and looked at it. The 5:15 came at last and the operator drew a long breath of relief as the suspect boarded it. He went back to his office and telegraphed the news.

The unconscious suspect made himself as comfortable as possible in the seat next to the window. It was a through train, and the passengers were just rousing from their night's rest. At the next station a man got on who questioned the conductor a moment, walked slowly through the car and back again, glancing keenly at all the passengers, then seated himself by the side of the suspect. This was rather surprising as there were plenty of unoccupied seats in the car. As the suspect turned to look at the intruder, he felt something cold against his cheek. It was a revolver, and a voice said in a low but distinct tone: "You are my prisoner. If you try to escape I shall shoot. Be quiet. Don't move."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried the astonished suspect.

"You are under arrest."

"What for?"

"Don't try that game. It won't work; and you needn't shout. I am not deaf."

"I am not either. Put that pistol up, and tell me what you are about."

"If you really want me to explain publicly what you are arrested for, I have no objections; but put out your hands!"

"I won't! You must be crazy! I think everybody was crazy last night, and you haven't got over it yet. You've got hold of the wrong man. What do you want to arrest me for? The only crime I have committed was to fall into a ditch, and I'm not likely to do it again. I have been shot at besides, and I am sick of the whole business."

"I thought you'd own up. Put out your hands. No more fooling."

"Wait a moment. Tell me what it is for. I have a right to know that."

"For murder."

"For murder?"

"Yes!"

"When? Where?"

"Quit your fooling. This is a serious business as you will find. You know all about it."

"When? where? who? I have a right to know."

"Robbing a house and killing a woman down at Elton last night. You've been tracked, so there is no use in denying it."

"It is a mistake. I never saw the place in my life. Give me five minutes to think how I can convince you."

"Ten if you like, only don't move."

The suspect was silent for a few moments.

"Please ask the conductor to come here. I want to see him."

When the conductor came, he proved to be a stranger.

"Conductor, I am in a pretty bad fix. I want you to help me out. This man wants to arrest me and I want to identify myself. As I boarded the train I thought I saw Judge Morton on the next car. Was I right?"

"I don't know the judge."

"He is a white-haired, elderly man sitting in the third or fourth seat from the door. Would you be kind enough to ask him to step here? Tell him a friend wants to see him."

The conductor departed and soon returned with the judge.

"Good morning, Judge! This officer wants to arrest me for robbing a house and murdering a woman down at Elton—a town I never saw. Can you think of any way to convince him that I am not the man he wants?"

"Very likely I can, as I see the officer is an old acquaintance. Mr. Bowden, what are you doing with the ex-pastor of the Fifteenth? This gentleman I have known since he was a boy, and I assure you, that he is no more likely to be robbing or murdering than you or I. You'll have to look somewhere else for your man this time."

After a little more conversation the officer was convinced, and the three chatted pleasantly the remainder of the way to the city.

"Judge, would you mind walking up past my house? I have been taken for a drunkard, a tramp, a chicken-thief, a robber and murderer in the last twelve hours. I begin to feel as if I needed a guardian. I'd like to have you along to identify me, in case of necessity."

The judge laughed, and they walked up the street together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LETTER.

"Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs." CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

Our wanderer had a key in his pocket with which he unlocked the front door, devoutly hoping that no one would discover him during the process. He was anxious to improve his personal appearance before being seen by friends or neighbors. What if Esther had come back? He hurried up-stairs without being noticed by the house-keeper. It was not necessary that she should become acquainted with his present plight. Esther was not there. He paused in front of the mirror and viewed himself.

"No wonder they took me for a tramp, and a burglar, and a murderer! Hat battered out of shape; one black eye; one torn coat; a good deal of very black mud. Lucky that farmer didn't have

me arrested for carrying off his real estate! If it had been a city lot, the owner would! I'll have a bath and some clean clothes and then perhaps it may not be dangerous for me to make my appearance on the street. Really, I don't believe I have had much to eat since yesterday morning! I ate a lunch on the train yesterday noon, and forgot all about supper. But I won't have time to wait for breakfast. I wonder if I'll ever tell Esther all about last night? I'll make it my business to get ready and get over there before that nine o'clock mail. Esther must never see that letter!"

At a quarter to nine o'clock he was walking up the steps of Esther's old home. He rang the bell, wondering who would answer it. It was Esther's mother. She gave him a startled glance.

"Why, Wayland! What has happened?"

"Nothing serious; my black eye is the result of a fall. Where is Esther?"

"But—you don't look right. Really, Wayland, you will get killed sometime by those very disreputable rogues you are trying to reform. When you are late we feel so worried."

"But you haven't told me where Esther is!"

"Don't you know? Didn't you get her note? She is out to Helen's. Frank was brought home with a broken leg, and Helen was nearly frightened to death. She sent one messenger for me and another for Esther. I was out there all day yesterday. Frank is doing nicely but Esther isn't looking well. She is expecting you on every train."

"But the housekeeper said she came home!"

"She did. She came to go with me but I had already gone. She followed on the next train. I wish you would go out and take her home. She isn't fit to be there and they have a trained nurse, so Helen doesn't really need her. I hope you will start on your trip in a day or two. I believe you both need a change and a rest."

"Did a letter come here for Esther this morning?"

"I haven't seen any. I don't know whether the postman has come yet or not. The door-bell rang just as Harry started to go to Helen's. It may have been the mail. If there was a letter for Esther he would put it in his pocket and take it out to her. You've just about time to catch the first train, or will you stop and rest a while?"

"I'll try for the first train—but—if that letter should come here, will you please take care of it and keep it for me? I wrote it last night and I've changed my mind about some of the things in it, and I would rather Esther shouldn't see it. Will you keep it for me?"

"I suppose so," she said hesitatingly. "You say it is one you wrote?"

"Yes; I would like to keep the contents of the letter secret a while longer. I would wait for it myself, if I was sure it would come soon. But as you say, perhaps Harry has taken it to her. Anything you wish to send?"

"No, thank you. I hope you will find Esther well. Good-bye."

If Harry had that letter what was to be done? So she had noticed Esther's paleness too. What madness possessed him to write that letter! What could have become of Esther's note! Did street cars and trains ever move so slowly before? Esther expecting him, looking for him, worrying over his absence, needing him, and he off going to sleep in the woods, and falling into ditches, and getting himself shot at and arrested! He felt very trifling and small! If the letter should

reach her before he did! The thought caused him agony, and if ever a man regretted having given himself up to be governed by anger, Wayland was that man.

Esther's sister, Helen, had recently married and lived in a small suburban town. When he left the train, he walked rapidly the first few blocks, but as he approached the house his footsteps became slower and slower. He dreaded the meeting. If Esther had received that letter how could he look her in the face! The windows were open and he could hear voices in the little parlor. He knocked, and then he heard Esther say:

"I think it must be Wayland. Let me go to the door," and a moment later she stood before him.

"Why, Wayland! What is the matter? Did some of those ruffians attack you? I have been wondering why you did not come. Are you hurt? Frank is all right. The doctor says he is doing nicely. Come into the parlor and sit down in the rocking chair. The doctor is here now. I'll ask him for something to put on that bruise, where somebody must have hit you."

He followed her into the parlor, threw aside his hat, clasped her in his arms and kissed her again and again. "Esther! Esther! Esther!" was all he could say.

"One would think we had not seen each other for months," she remarked, withdrawing herself from his arms, but examining the bruise with a soft caressing touch. "How did it happen?"

"It is nothing serious. I fell and hurt it."

"Sit down and let me tell the doctor before he goes. But why didn't you come last night? I looked and looked for you!"

"How could I? I didn't know where you were!"

"Didn't you read my note?"

"I couldn't find any to read."

"Couldn't find it? I put it right there on the top of the bible. You couldn't step into the room without seeing it!"

"But I did! I stepped all around the room and couldn't find a thing of it."

"Did you see Ruby?"

"She had gone to Clara's."

"It must be she read that note and then put it in her pocket instead of leaving it for you! She is so careless!"

"Very likely that is exactly what she did, for no note could I find, and I looked everywhere."

As she attempted to pass out of the room, he caught her, and held her and kissed her again in spite of her laughing resistance.

"Wayland, do you love me?" she asked, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"Better than my own life," he answered gravely.

"I expected you to say, 'Esther, do you need to ask?' and I was going to say, 'No; I knew it without asking.' But that doctor may come out at any moment. I fear he will think us silly," she continued struggling to free herself. He did not let her go.

"Esther, do you love me?" he asked gravely. There was something in his manner, and a look in his eyes that constrained her to answer, though she would not be serious.

"O perhaps—a little—just a trifle," she answered softly. "The doctor is coming! I hear him. Let me go, quick!"

She loved him! She loved him! The world looked bright again. The letter had not reached her and he would take good care that it never should.

A few hours later they went home together, as happy as two children over their proposed trip. As they entered their room Esther looked around in surprise.

"What is the matter? It looks as if burglars had been here! My work-basket upset! The curtain torn! The bureau drawers all open and everything turned upside down! What does it mean?"

"It merely means that troublesome husband of yours was hunting for a note which he couldn't find," replied that individual meekly.

"Do you suppose I will ever be able to find anything again? Oh, Wayland! What's this here in the closet? I wondered at your coming over in a black suit this hot day. What in the world did you do to yourself and your clothes, last night? Your hat looks as if it had been used for a foot-ball!"

"Yes; I thought it would disgrace the hall rack so I brought it up here. You see I fell into a ditch head first, and then walked on my hat."

"A ditch! Where could you find a ditch, big enough to fall into? And your coat is torn, and there is mud on everything! And you haven't told

me yet what happened. It looks very much as if you would have to get you a new suit if we start to morrow. Did somebody try to kill you?"

"No-o, not exactly. I'll go and get the suit now."

"That is because you don't want to tell me what happened," she said severely. "I believe somebody tried to murder you."

"No, indeed! that is not it at all. I was lone-some, so I took a train and rode off into the country. I found some woods and went to sleep, and the next thing I knew it was raining. It was pitch dark too, and when I climbed a fence, the top rail broke, and I went head first into a ditch. I fell down two or three times before I got to the road, and had a great time generally finding my way out, but I don't think that rail was particularly anxious to murder me."

"But why didn't you come over after me?"

"How did I know what minute you would come home? Harry comes with you so often, I hardly thought you would need a double escort. But what have you done with his picture that was hanging up here?"

"I took some of the pictures down and packed

them away until after our return. They are better off than hanging here in the dust and smoke. I packed my dresses away too."

"I am going after the suit now."

"And I'll put the room in order while you are gone."

When he came back the room was in order and she was sitting thoughtfully by the window.

"Wayland, did you find a letter in my work-basket?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What did you do with it?"

He looked at her keenly and saw that the question must be answered. He took a chair and seated himself by her.

"I was looking for your note and thought perhaps I had found it, or that the letter was an explanation of your absence. So—I read it."

"It was very careless of me. I never meant you to see that letter. I ought to have destroyed it. I didn't intend that you should be troubled with it. Helen's message was so sudden that I forgot all about it, and left it in my work-basket. I really don't see what object the writer could have in sending me such a letter as that! I

thought about burning it, and then I thought if they should undertake to persecute you in some other way, it might be well to have this to help find out who was doing it. So I decided to keep it, but not to let you know anything about it unless it was necessary. I couldn't think where to put it, for I couldn't bear to have it among my other letters. I was re-reading it and considering what to do with it, when the message came from Helen, and it seems I dropped it in the work-basket, exactly where you would be sure to find it! Now that you have seen it, you may do what you think best with it."

"But I found a slip of paper with just these words on it and they were in your handwriting: 'Look in the work-basket.'"

"I don't know how that could be! Oh yes; I do! That was to tell Ruby where to find a piece of satin I had painted for Clara. I wanted her to be sure to take it with her."

He felt like a criminal. Her love for him and confidence in him had been unshaken, while he —! And yet, there were just one or two more points that he wanted cleared up. He never should be satisfied until he knew how it had all come about.

"I believe the writer expressed a desire to see you, in order to give you further information in regard to my character. Did you go?" he asked in as light a tone as he could command.

"Did I go! No, indeed! What a question? I am surprised that you should ask," she answered indignantly.

"I met Brown and he said that he saw you in company with another lady, talking with some one near the corner of Fifteenth and M—street. So—I thought—I didn't know—"

"What did you think?" she asked with an expression of surprise and pain on her face. "I was there. I went with Mrs. James to visit that sick girl she told us about. You knew I was going to see her. What did you think?" she repeated as he hesitated.

"I thought—perhaps—you went to ask," he answered slowly.

"Oh Wayland! How could you think that!"

"The postman is coming," he remarked, glancing out of the window. "He is on the steps now, and he has letters in his hand. I will go down and bring them up."

The postman handed him two letters, one for

himself and one for Esther. He tore his open and glanced at it—it was of no moment. But hers! It was Harry's handwriting, and it was thick and heavy. It probably contained the missing letter which Esther must not read! What was to be done! Probably Harry had the letter with him while at Helen's but had forgotten to deliver it. As soon as he found it in his pocket he had written a note to put with it and posted it.

Then a terrible temptation assailed Wayland. Harry had seen her that morning. There could be nothing of importance in his note. Why not destroy it? Surely he had a right to do what he would with his own letter, and it would be so hard to explain. *Why not destroy it?* But—could he ever look Esther in the face again, if he did that? What could he say when she asked if there was any mail for her! Esther always told the truth. He had never lied to her—should he begin now? He could not. He would try to be worthy of her—but what a miserable failure he was making of it! He hoped she would never find out what a wretch he was! He would at least try to meet her truth and honesty with the

same qualities. He took the letter up-stairs and placed it in her lap.

"From Harry? I wonder why he should write? And such a thick letter too? How can he have so much to say, when I saw him this morning?"

He watched her as she opened it. Yes, there was the letter he had written when he was too angry to realize what he was doing. There was also a note from Harry which she was reading.

"And so you wrote to me last night, did you," she asked with a smile. "Harry had the letter in his pocket and took it down to Helen's this morning but forgot to give it to me. I told him I was coming home so he sent it, thinking it would get here about as soon as I did."

"But now, as you have me, you don't need the letter," remarked Wayland lightly, trying with gentle force to remove it from her fingers. She did not release her hold upon it, but clung the tighter.

"It must be a love letter," she said. "I have had so few letters from you, Wayland—just seven in all, I think. I have them put in a box, every one, and this will make eight. Shall we read it together, or shall I put it away to read some time when you are gone and I am lonesome?"

"We will read it together if you must read it," he said with something so like a sob in his voice that it startled her. "Esther, I beg of you, give me the letter. Do not read it. I have changed my mind about—something," he added hesitatingly. "Give it to me. I don't want you to read it."

"But, Wayland, it is mine! You sent it to me. You wanted me to read it when you wrote it—or you would not have written it. Were you angry because I had gone away? Let me read it and see—I want to know what you were thinking about last night."

"It is yours, Esther, I do not deny that. You have a right to read it, but I beg of you—give it to me!"

"We will read it together," she continued, laying her face against his, and putting her arm around his neck. "If you were not altogether too cross about it, perhaps I will forgive you," and she pressed her lips upon his forehead.

"Esther, if you love me, give me that letter."

"If I love you?" she asked wonderingly. "Why, Wayland, what is in it? What dreadful thing did you write? It can't be that you thought—"

She withdrew herself from his arms and looked searchingly in his face. "Wayland, *what* did you think?" she asked with a voice sharp with pain. "You did not—you could not—did you think that I believed what was in that letter? That I—oh, my husband, I never doubted you, never, until now." She covered her face with her hands and turned from him. He would have clasped her in his arms but she would not permit it. "Wait, not now. Let me think a little!" she said. "You frighten me."

He rose to his feet, and stood with folded arms and watched her in silence. This was bad enough, but if she read the letter it would be worse. Esther was a proud woman. If she read that letter he feared that she would never forgive him.

"Esther, look at me! Do you doubt your husband?"

She turned toward him and looked at him earnestly for one long moment.

"Wayland, I beg your pardon," she said in a low tone. He opened his arms and she rested within them. "Forgive me, Wayland, I am ashamed that I should have doubted you for one moment even."

"My darling, I am glad that you did, for that proves that you are human, and I was beginning to fear that you were an angel, and would be slipping away out of my life. I am not good enough to feel sure of keeping an angel with me. You look so frail, so tired, that I feel worried about you. Now, darling, while I hold you in my arms let me confess, and because you yourself have doubted, you will find it easier to forgive. I came home and found you gone. I found a note, no explanation—except that letter. The housekeeper could tell me nothing about you. Ruby was not here to explain. I became unreasonably angry, and I sat down and wrote you a letter of which I am thoroughly ashamed. Esther, darling, forgive me, and let me burn the wretched thing. Kiss me, dear, and say you forgive me."

She made no answer. Surprised and pained at her silence, he looked into her face. She had fainted. The letter was still tightly clasped in her unconscious fingers.

CHAPTER X.

ON SUMMER SEAS.

"How is it that the poets have said so many fine things about our first love, so few about our later love! Are their first poems their best? or are they not the best which come from their fuller thought, their larger experience, their deeper-rooted affections? The boy's flute-like voice has its own charm; but the man's should yield a richer, deeper music." GEORGE ELIOT.

They were on deck. Esther was reclining in an easy chair, which Wayland had obtained the captain's permission to bring on board. A light shawl was thrown about her shoulders, and an open book lay in her lap. Her eyes were fixed dreamily upon the blue waters through which the vessel was gliding. Besides the beating of the engine and the murmur of the waves, the sound of laughing voices reached her ears. The most of the passengers were gathered at the other end of the vessel under the awning, where they could obtain a better view of the shores they were passing. Esther enjoyed this view where noth-

ing was visible save sea and sky, illuminated by the brightest sunshine. She was studying the tints of the water, and wondering if she would ever be able to reproduce those tints with mere paints.

"They are holding quite an animated discussion over there," said Wayland, approaching her and bringing with him a chair in which he seated himself at her side.

"What is the subject?" she inquired carelessly.

"Is marriage a failure?" he answered. "What do you think?"

"Sometimes it is, and sometimes it is not. There is no general rule—marriage is neither always a failure nor always a success," she answered lightly looking away across the sea.

"The general verdict of the passengers seems to be that it is very apt to be a failure. I notice that the bride and bridegroom—you remember you pointed them out to me at breakfast—are quite shocked at the tone of the discussion. It evidently had not occurred to them that marriage was so often a failure."

"I think their marriage is quite likely to prove a failure."

"Why?"

"She is so evidently his superior."

"I had not thought of that!"

"Where the difference is so great, I do not see how a marriage can be happy. A woman would better be in her coffin than married to a man who is distinctly her inferior."

"Then I fear the world is full of unhappy marriages," he answered a little sadly. "It is seldom that we see husband and wife of equal ability, education and culture."

"People are so thoughtless in regard to what should concern them most. I was not thinking particularly of mental ability or education but of moral fitness. The good woman who is married to a bad man—think what torture she suffers! And it must work the same way if a good man is married to a bad woman. Still, he is supposed to be stronger, perhaps he is better able to bear it. Then again, the man who is out in the business world can forget home difficulties better than the woman who stays at home and perhaps broods over the differences which will come up in every family. Marriage is a dangerous experiment for any woman and I wonder that so many of them try it."

Her eyes were fixed upon the water, and her face wore a far-away look. He watched her intently and wondered if it could be that she was thinking of her own marriage as a failure.

"Then you are sure that it is a more dangerous experiment for the woman than for the man," he asked quietly.

"Yes; when a woman marries she makes a bid for happiness. If her husband proves unworthy, she has no other world to fall back upon, as he has. She must drag out her dreary existence, usually at his side, for if she leaves him, she will have a host of bitter memories, and a sense of unfulfilled duties that will follow her to the day of her death. A failure is fatal to her happiness for life. She can never be what she would have been if she had retained her freedom. I believe that the woman of the future will think longer before she enters the bonds of matrimony. As a result there will be fewer unhappy wives; fewer women who love what they imagine the man to be, instead of what he really is. That is the cause of the most of the unhappiness in wedded life. Each marries an ideal, instead of the real person. When they become acquainted with each

other the disappointment is so bitter that love is lost—buried under a mass of disappointed hopes and broken ideals."

"I have been particularly fortunate," he said, watching her closely as he spoke, "I have found marriage an unqualified success—in both cases."

"Thank you for the compliment," she replied turning toward him with a smile on her face, "You and Jennie certainly seemed very happy together."

What did she mean? She was watching the sea again, with that same far-away look in her eyes. Was her ideal shattered? Would it be possible for any mortal man to live up to her ideal? How far had he succeeded in doing it? He thought of his matrimonial short-comings or of what might appear such to Esther. She was proud and sensitive. Could she forgive? Was that the one fault in her otherwise perfect character? Her standard was high and it was so easy to fall below it! What did she mean by saying that he and Jennie seemed happy together, and saying no more. Did she intend him to understand that she was not happy? He too watched the waves and there was a long silence.

"You look troubled, Wayland—what is it?" she asked gently.

Practically they were as much alone as if on a desert island. There was nothing but the sea, and the sky, and the sun, to look and listen.

"What were you thinking about while I was gone?" he asked, wondering if she would mention the letter which had caused him so much anxiety.

"I was thinking what a glorious thing it is to be alive; to be an active, conscious part of the universe. The earth, the sea, the sky, are all so beautiful on such a day as this! Merely to exist is good."

"But death follows close on the heels of life," he answered sadly. "You look so frail, I fear you will slip away from me some of these days."

"Yet death is nothing but a change," she answered slowly. "Why should we fear it? If we use the opportunities of this life wisely, the next will give us greater opportunities. That thought alone is enough to rouse our sleeping energies, to awaken the highest and noblest within us. Thank God for life and for death also, which is the awakening to another life. As for me—I am

ready for the change when it comes, but I think I shall remain with you many years. That doctor should not have frightened you, by telling you about my heart. All will be well if I do not overwork—but I do love to paint! There is a fascination about the work, which leads me to tax my strength beyond its limit. Something else is troubling you, Wayland—what is it? Let us have no secrets from each other. I am tired of secrets."

He looked around. There was no one within hearing distance, unless it were a weary bird which had perched on the upper deck to rest, and was looking down on them with as much curiosity as its tired little body could contain.

"Esther, have you forgiven me for burning that wretched letter? I know it was not a brave or manly thing to do . . . to take advantage of you while you were unconscious . . . and take from you what you did not willingly give me . . . but . . . Esther, will you forgive me?"

"I would have given it to you, Wayland! I never would have read it without your consent. You do not think me so willful as that do you? So you see there is nothing to forgive. But I

really would like to know *why* you burned it!"

"Must I tell you?"

"I leave it entirely with you. There must have been something dreadful in that letter, but if you do not wish to tell me about it, you need not. I remember though, that you used to think confession was good for the soul," she added playfully, "when you urged me to confess all the arts and wiles by which I lured you into the bonds of matrimony. Perhaps, if you should confess you would feel better—that is what you used to tell me!"

He did not smile.

"The letter is nothing," she added a moment later. "Surely you cannot be worrying over that! And as to my health, it would be wrong for either of us to worry about that. I had almost forgotten that letter, until you recalled it to my memory. I should have given it to you unread when I found you really wanted it. I can trust you, my husband!"

He felt as if a weight was lifting from his heart, as he listened to these words. Perhaps then it was not altogether the excitement in regard to the letter which had caused her to faint,

but as she and the doctor said, overwork. He had burned the letter. It was the least of two evils. He could not let her read it. She would forgive him for burning it more readily than for writing it, if she knew its contents. If she was willing to let the subject pass he was thankful to do so. Further remarks would only serve to arouse suspicion.

"I saw Profesor DeLong last week, and had quite a long talk with him."

"Did you? What did he say?"

"A great many things; some of which I believed, some I doubted, and some I disbelieved."

"Nobody is expected to believe what does not seem reasonable to him."

"Very nearly the reply he made when I stated some of my objections. A person can't see until he does see, and a blind man is not to blame for not seeing the sunshine. But he mistakes, if, because he cannot see it, he declares that there is no sunshine. Professor DeLong indicated that if my spiritual development was not sufficiently advanced to enable me to see certain things, which he calls truths, I have no more right to say that they are not true, than the blind man has to say that there is no sunshine."

"And that doctrine does not suit you?"

"Not exactly. You see I am not quite willing to acknowledge that other people's spirituality, inner perceptions, higher self, or whatever you choose to call it—is more highly developed than mine. It makes me feel like an inferior creation."

"Perhaps it would be pleasanter for us to go through life without feeling our inferiority—but it might not be best. Physically, compared with the most of the men one meets, you are well developed. But look at our captain! He towers above you! If he should try, he could pick you up and throw you out into the sea, in spite of your best efforts to prevent it. Do you feel like an inferior creation when you are in his presence?"

"Not necessarily. Physically he is my superior, but I possess qualities which he does not, which helps to even up matters. He can take charge of a vessel, I, of an audience."

"Exactly; certain of your faculties are more highly developed than certain of his, and vice versa. Why should it hurt your feelings more to acknowledge superiority of inner development,

than to acknowledge superiority of physical development, or even of mental development? Now that astronomer you were talking with half an hour ago, has done everything with figures, except to count the stars in the universe. Does your inferiority to him in mathematics disturb your peace of mind?"

"Not at all!"

"Then, if the superiority of the captain and the astronomer is not offensive to your self-love, why should you object to the superiority of the man whose inner senses are more highly developed than yours?"

"It would be a little hard to tell why—but I do object! Why should he be given powers which are not granted to me?"

"Speaking from your point of view, why should the captain be given greater strength, or the astronomer greater mathematical ability than most other men possess? Speaking from a theosophical point of view, it is because they have earned them. We are what we have made ourselves. Our character is in our own hands, and character decides everything. The future is ours to make of it what we will; only we must pay our debts.

We cannot escape paying the penalty for our misdeeds. Justice, eternal justice, is the watch-word of the universe."

"Justice, eternal justice! Are you so sure, Esther? It is the one thing that puzzles me more than all others! How to justify the ways of God to man! How to convince myself and others that God is surely just. I have more sympathy than I used to have, with those who doubt. The world is so full of what seems to be injustice. How can I convince myself and others that it is only seeming and not real? God's love is more apparent to me than God's justice. While you, I hear you speak oftener of justice than of any other attribute. Where do you get your ideas? From Professor DeLong, or out of that pile of queer books on your study table? I spent an hour over those books the other day, and I must confess that I found nothing in them, which seemed to me worthy of a sensible man's attention. Two or three of them were utterly unintelligible to me—as much so as if they had been written in Japanese. Some of the others contained queer looking figures with queerer explanations, while some of them seemed to be ghost stories written for grown-up people."

"You seem to have been unfortunate in your selection. It is the same with theosophy as with all other topics; there are a few good books on the subject and a great many poor ones. The next time you wish to spend an hour on theosophy, let me select the books for you. Children learning to read usually begin with the primer, and would find the fourth or fifth reader quite as unintelligible as if written in Japanese."

"But I am not a child, and I supposed myself capable of understanding English. The contents of some of those books are nothing but stuff and nonsense to me."

"I believe you were not particularly fond of mathematics and never pursued the subject further than algebra and geometry. Suppose the astronomer should invite you to his room, and show you some of his favorite works on trigonometry, conic sections, analytical geometry, or calculus, and you should spend an hour looking at them. They are written in English, but would you find them intelligible? Would they not be stuff and nonsense—to you?"

"I grant your point, but is it a parallel case? Why should theosophy be unintelligible to a person of ordinary intelligence?"

"Why should algebra be unintelligible to a person of ordinary intelligence, until by study he has prepared himself to understand it? I think it is a parallel case. None of the mysteries of the universe can be understood, without serious study and reflection. An advanced work on theosophy would be just as unintelligible to a beginner as an advanced algebra would be to the person who has never studied algebra. Wayland, do you wish to study theosophy?" she asked, looking at him searchingly.

"Would you advise me to?"

"Do just as you choose. That is a matter which every individual must settle for himself."

"Professor DeLong said that a man who was satisfied with his religious belief had no need of theosophy."

"On the principle that a man who wears a good coat that fits him has no need of another until the first wears out, or he outgrows it."

"But suppose he wants a better one?"

"That shows that the one he is wearing does not meet all of his needs."

"And you think the theosophical coat would?"

"I did not say that. It would be entirely ac-

cording to the spiritual development of the individual. The theosophical coat might not fit at all."

"In the main my theological coat suits me very well; but I fear there are a few places which are getting a little threadbare! So—evidently theosophy is not for me at present."

"Evidently it is not."

"Still, I would like to know a little more about it! Thoughts are things, Professor DeLong says, and the spiritual is much more real than the physical. The spirit is immortal, and bodies are merely the clothes it wears. Am I quoting him aright?"

"Yes."

"I would like to know what arguments he brings forth to prove some of his statements. Perhaps I will go with you some day—shall I?"

"Certainly—if you would like to go, I shall be glad to have you. But remember—it is your offer not my request. Don't raise your expectations too high. Don't expect to see flowers falling from the ceiling, or letters sailing through the air, or ghosts oozing through the walls. We are not adepts, we are only students gathering ourselves

together, to read and discuss important books relating to the laws which govern the spiritual universe. We are trying to find out how much it is possible for the spirit of man to accomplish. If you wish to come and study with us, you will be most welcome, but don't expect to see wonders, for if you do you will be disappointed."

There was a short silence which he broke by remarking, "You appear to have a great deal of faith in the woman of the future, Esther."

"I have. It seems to me that every woman who attended the World's Congress of Women must have. It was grand, Wayland! I couldn't help wishing you were there! To see representative women workers from all over the world, meeting together, and discussing plans for woman's work in the future; work which will reach out into almost every home in almost every land. And when those pioneers, Mrs. Stone and Miss Anthony told us of the persecutions which women who wanted to have their way about how the world's work should be done, suffered, less than half a century ago, it made us feel that the woman of to-day must do great things in order to prove herself worthy of her opportunities.

Mrs. Stone, gentlest and most lovable of women, told us how, years ago, while standing on the platform lecturing, she had books and eggs thrown at her, and once was drenched from head to foot by a pail of cold water thrown over her through a window near her head. What a contrast to that afternoon in Washington Hall when an audience of 3,000 people rose to their feet with cheers and the waving of handkerchiefs to greet Miss Anthony! And how happy she looked! She told us of the difficulties she experienced forty years ago, and pointed out the contrast between then and now, the past and the present."

"There is a change. The men of to-day do not throw cold water upon lady speakers—literally."

"Sometimes they do figuratively."

"O well! we don't expect as much of common ordinary men as we do of the women of the future."

"You may smile as much as you please and look lofty, but the Woman's Congress was grand! If you had been there you would know how to appreciate it! If I had been obliged to miss one, I would rather have missed seeing the White City itself than to have missed the Woman's Congress."

"O Esther! the whole World's Fair, art gallery and all!"

"I forgot the art gallery just for a moment; no, I couldn't afford to miss that. I am thankful that I was not obliged to miss any of it. But the Woman's Congress was the best part of it all—except the art gallery. There were so many women that I had always wanted to see."

"Were any of them married?"

"Of course! dozens of them!"

"What could have made them so foolish? I suppose you women of the future will change all of that!"

"The woman of the future will marry, but she will not hold herself so cheap. She will marry better men."

"Where on earth is she to find them? I'm thinking she will have to establish relations with some other planet and have them shipped in. Perhaps the imported article would suit better than the native."

"How absurd you are, Wayland! Now as a punishment I shall not tell you a word about the other wonderful women I saw and heard at the Congress."

She opened her book and tried to fix her attention upon it, but her eyes continually wandered to the sea. The play of light upon the water interested her more than the book. He watched every expression of her face with the keenest interest. Was she happy? Or was she disappointed in her married life? Had her marriage in her own estimation proved a failure? He felt as if he would gladly give a year of his life to know that she was satisfied. Would he ever know? Would she ever tell him? Esther was still a problem—as she had always been. If she was satisfied, why would she never acknowledge it? It seemed as if a happy woman would be willing to own that she was happy. He had done his best to make her happy, but if he had failed—what then? He must know whether he had failed or not. Unhappiness would kill a woman like Esther. The world without Esther! What would it be like? It did not seem to him as if he would be able to face it. But her health was failing. The doctor seemed puzzled. Esther herself said it was overwork; that all she needed was rest She also said there should be no secrets between them. Thus they sat in silence.

watching the track of the vessel, until in the distance it faded into the surrounding waste of waters.

"Esther, do you love me?" he asked abruptly.

"Wayland, do you need to ask?" she replied, looking toward him in surprise.

"Yes; I would know whether it is duty that binds your life to mine, or love. I know you well enough to realize, that if you had ceased to love me—unless the matrimonial bond proved galling beyond endurance—you would still remain with me, a dutiful wife, seeking to hide from me your unhappiness, and to make my life as pleasant as lay in your power. Esther, I cannot bear to think that perhaps your love is less than it was the day you married me. You have grown dearer and dearer to me, as the years have passed, but it has been a long time since I have heard you say that you loved me. If I ask the question you always evade it; sometimes you answer with a kiss, sometimes with another question. You do just as I am sure you would do, if the spirit of love had fled, and duty alone kept you with me. Esther, if you still love me, tell me so, at least once . . . I long to hear you

say it. If you do not—" his voice grew husky with emotion, "that I must know. I will bear it as well as I can—but I must know. This suspense is too hard."

She had been looking across the waters, but as he finished speaking she turned her face toward him and he looked into her eyes as if he would read her very soul. What did he see there? Something which filled him with a sense of gladness and caused his heart to leap with joy.

"Wayland, I love you with my whole heart and soul," she answered in a low tone. "I thought you knew—how could you doubt?"

"I feared that I had disappointed you. If you loved me, Esther, why would you not acknowledge it?"

She continued in the same low thrilling tone: "I thought you knew that I loved you better than life itself—that without you the world would be dark indeed! I thought you knew that I was holden with the cords of love! Once I was free, but now I am in bondage. I am no longer an independent woman with a will of my own. Your will is mine, your wish my law. My love has grown with the years, and my greatest fear has

been that you would be disappointed in me. I love you, Wayland, I love you! If I should say it as often as I think it, the sound of my voice would weary your ears. Never doubt it again, Wayland, never—unless you change your nature and become unworthy of love. I am a better woman because I have known you. You are helping me onward and upward. Your faith helps me; your love of righteousness helps and strengthens me. Where I am weak, you are strong. My whole earthly life is bound up in you. I fear sometimes that it is wrong for one mortal to love another as I love you. And yet—it is through human love that we learn how great is God's love."

His face lighted up while she was speaking. He lifted her hand to his lips. "Thank you, Esther," he said in a low tone which expressed deep emotion, and then there was a silence which spoke more than words. It seemed to them as if they were lifted a little above the earth and things of earth. Heaven was close at hand.

But they were soon reminded that earth has its claims by the voices of their companions, who were loitering toward them.

"Esther, you are an angel," he whispered. "I look at you every day with fear and trembling to see if the wings have begun to grow," and then he added more seriously, "You have lifted a weight from my heart. Your praise makes me feel most unworthy . . . There are half a dozen people coming this way and bringing their chairs. They are still discussing that interminable question, which each couple must settle for themselves—is marriage a failure? What do you think, Esther?"

"Not in our case. Marriage is never a failure when it is a union of souls."

THE END





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